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IDEOLOGY AND ELITE CONFLICTS



AUTOPSY OF THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

MESSAY KEBEDE



Ideology and Elite Conflicts
Autopsy of the Ethiopian Revolution

Messay Kebede



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This book is dedicated to Ethiopia and its people, who became the victims of a revolution carried out in their name.

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Abbreviations

CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions
COPWE	Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
MEISON	Mela Ethiopia Socialist Neqenaye (All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
TPLF	Tigrean People's Liberation Front
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

Note on Ethiopian Names

Since the custom in Ethiopia does not use the system of family names, the book identifies Ethiopians by their first name rather than their last name. The latter, which is the first name of the father, is not used to identify a person; it is simply an addition to the real name, namely, the given first name.

Preface

While the concept of revolution ordinarily fills us with images of the masses protesting and clashing with government forces, this book moves the focus to elites and their conflicts. The change of emphasis assigns to this preface the initial task of specifying the notion of "elite," given the widespread practice of a loose usage of the term.

I use the term "elite" in distinction to "class" to signify the competition for the control of state power by forces that are not defined by the ownership of economic assets. True, a ruling class is an elite group in that it controls power and enjoys status and prestige that are uncommon, but it owes its high social standing to its ownership of economic means. However, in Ethiopia and many Third World countries, elite groups control power and enjoy uncommon lifestyles without having the direct possession of economic means. Such is the case with military, bureaucratic, or technocratic elites. The fact about such elites is that the control of state power, especially of its military and security forces, gives them a privileged access to economic wealth. Understandably, such elites compete over the exclusive control of state power, which they use to extract hefty revenues from an economic system of which they are not productive members. It is with this distinction in mind that this study often applies the term "class" to Ethiopia's traditional nobility, given that its power was the direct emanation of land ownership. The word "elite" is reserved to military groups, officials of political movements (including representatives of ethnonationalist or religious movements), the intelligentsia, the bureaucratic stratum, etc.

The preponderance of elites, political elites in particular, over economic classes is a direct consequence of a modernization process that was primarily introduced, as prescribed by the colonial paradigm of modernization, by externally induced super-structural means (to use a Marxist term) rather than through an internal process of social changes. According to the paradigm, modern economic classes and productive systems were to be progressively drawn from the institution of modern governments run by Western-educated elites, imprudently

baptized agents of modernization. Because externally induced super-structural changes preceded internal evolutions, a social system that institutionalized the preponderance of noneconomic elites came into being, with the consequence that the economic apparatus turned into a ruling instrument of political elites. Accordingly, the goal of such elites is not to facilitate the growth of production and exchange; rather, it is to subsume the economic system to the political purpose of retaining state power—essentially by using the repressive forces of the modern state—and extracting resources to support their privileged status.

This book maintains that the subordination of economic modernization to the interests of political elites accurately defines modern Ethiopia. Though the country defeated all the challenges to its existence for many centuries, it found itself in an existential quagmire subsequent to a skewed encounter with modernity. At first the misfired modernization fostered a severe conflict between modernized elites and a traditional class defended by an autocratic system, the outcome of which was the overthrow of the political system by a revolutionary uprising. Unsurprisingly, the violent nature of the conflict favored the faction of the military elite that advocated the radicalization of the Revolution. However, no sooner had the military elite stabilized the movement by the institution of a repressive and intolerant system than it faced an even bloodier confrontation with ethnonationalist forces. Among the many consequences of this confrontation, the most salient are the defeat of the military regime, the secession of Eritrea, and the establishment of an ethnic federalism that is nowhere near lessening the confrontation of elite forces for hegemony.

To theorize a social movement as complex, massive, entangled, and eventful as a social revolution is a Herculean task that imposes modesty on the findings of this book. Moreover, whatever the thesis and the explanation, a theory of revolution cannot be anything other than a hindsight reconstruction, since to say otherwise would be to assume that events were predictable even before they actually happened. If anything, human history is a creative process; therefore, it defies any deductive claim before the actual occurrence of events. The best a theory of revolution can do is to attempt a retrospective construction after the fact.

Those who question the value of a reconstructive view should keep in mind that the purpose of a theoretical work cannot be to discourse on things that have already occurred, given that what has happened cannot be redone or undone. By contrast, the future is in front of us: it is not yet done and is given to us as something that we can fashion. Is it not reasonable, then, to assume that the interest of a theoretical work that reconstructs the past lies in its possible contribution to the shaping of the future?

The future appears as a determined outcome when people are unable to set their lives in perspective. Each time people fail to extract themselves from the present—that is, to step back from what is currently occurring—they condemn themselves to react mechanically to events, thus rendering themselves incapable of developing choices and acting accordingly.

Insofar as to explain the past is both to uncover and streamline the hidden forces that determine history, a theoretical work restores the detachment and therefore the freedom that people need to engage the future rationally instead of reacting impulsively. Indeed, a rational reappropriation objectifies the past, and thus emancipates the future from unconscious forces, thereby inviting people to evolve from passive to active agents by presenting the future as an object of choice, and not as an outcome of an engulfing necessity.

Bearing all this in mind, I ask you, the reader, to judge this work by how well it exposes and exorcises the demons of the past and how zealously its therapeutic value encourages a fresh perspective for the future. What best protects against the famous saying that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" is a remembrance that liberates people from the hidden forces that control them, thereby changing them for the better.

My belief is that the depiction of Ethiopia's modern history in terms of elite conflicts unravels the forces hidden in revolutionary and ethnonationalist ideologies and suggests the only way by which these conflicts can be geared toward a constructive path, namely, through democratic arbitration based on the principle of sovereignty of the people. Only when as free electors people assume the power of arbitration can Ethiopia find a nonviolent and inclusive method of resolving conflicts. What is detrimental is not the clash of interests, but the fact that the winner becomes both judge and party owing to the absence of an overarching authority with the exclusive right to settle political disputes.

Controversies over the Nature of the Ethiopian Social Change

The widespread social protest that resulted in the overthrow of Ethiopia's imperial regime in 1974 was soon followed by a series of radical and deep-going social changes that heralded the implementation of a socialist policy. Nevertheless, despite the unprecedented changes that took place, scholars do not agree on the true nature of the social transformation of Ethiopia. Those who speak of a genuine socialist revolution clash with those who denounce counterrevolutionary digressions. Some maintain that the transformations are minor against a background of overwhelming continuity. Another smaller group insists that socialism was used as a smokescreen for the implementation of state capitalism. Let us review briefly their main arguments for the purpose of getting a sense of the theoretical challenges that the Ethiopian transformations pose to existing theories of revolution.

The Ethiopian Revolution as a Classic Case

Christopher Clapham, a long-time student of Ethiopian politics, is among those who maintain that Ethiopia has gone through a genuine socialist revolution under the military regime known as the Derg.¹ He criticizes Western scholars, especially those with leftist creeds, for literally ignoring Ethiopia and its sweeping socialist revolution. "Despite the high level of recent interest in revolutionary socialist development strategies in Africa, and indeed in the Third World generally, the case of Ethiopia has been very largely neglected," he writes.² The neglect is inexcusable given the "consistency and determination" with which the military regime has implemented a development strategy thoroughly inspired by Marxism-Leninism.³

To show that a genuine, determined effort of socialist development was launched in Ethiopia, Clapham reiterates the various socialist measures that the Derg took, such as the nationalization of all rural and urban lands, industries, and financial establishments, and the creation of mass-based organizations, such as peasant and urban dwellers' associations. Not only was this a genuine effort to apply socialism, but it was also fairly successful, as opposed to so many regimes in Africa that claimed to be revolutionary while being either ideologically ambivalent or unable to effect radical measures. In short, the Ethiopian regime has implemented "a classic Marxist strategy of development, sincerely and fairly efficiently."⁴

Clapham's analysis is backed by Crawford Young who, as a scholar quite familiar with African developments, could not but emphasize the exceptional commitment of the Ethiopian regime to the ideology and development policy of socialism. During the 1960s and 1970s, many African regimes—even military ones—claimed to be socialist. Such were the cases of Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Madagascar, Tanzania, Guinea, and Somalia, to name a few. Yet none of them has implemented changes remotely comparable to the staggering transformations of the Ethiopian social fabric. It is true that regimes that had an earnest commitment to the socialist ideology had appeared in Africa, as in Mozambique and Angola; however, such regimes were established as a result of anti-colonial struggles targeting the end of foreign rule. Unlike the Ethiopian case, these were not the outcome of internal class confrontations causing the overthrow of a traditional ruling elite, nor were their social transformations comparable to those accomplished by Ethiopia's military regime. According to Crawford, fully aware of the contrast of the Ethiopian case with other African regimes that claimed a similar ideological allegiance, "Soviet as well as Western observers have suggested that it is the only true African revolution to date; others that claim this designation, they suggest, are in reality mere national liberation movements."⁵

To emphasize to what extent the ideological consistency and the magnitude of the transformations deserve a serious study, two scholars who have investigated the Ethiopian Revolution closely do not hesitate to write that the "revolution was reminiscent not of the recent upsurges in the Third World but of the classic revolutions of Europe—France in 1789 and the February 1917 revolution in Russia."⁶ Indeed, all the basic ingredients that single out the classical cases of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions are manifest in the Ethiopian Revolution. As in the classical revolutions, the Ethiopian transformation displays: (1) the momentum of class struggle resulting in the overthrow of a landed nobility and its imperial state; (2) the complete change of the social system through a radical and sweeping nationalization of the means of production; (3) deep alterations in the structure of the state and its ideological configuration; and (4) a shift in Ethiopia's international alignment from the West to the East. The change, thus, was both total and drastic.

In terms of violence, too, the Ethiopian Revolution does not pale in comparison with the great revolutions of France, Russia, and China. Confirming those

scholars who readily define revolution by violent changes, the unfolding of the Ethiopian upheaval has changed the society into a battlefield strewn with untold human and material destruction. The death toll was so enormous that one scholar writes, perhaps with a bit of exaggeration:

History offers few examples of revolutions that have devoured their own children with such voraciousness and so much cruelty. It can be estimated that, of ten civilians who had actively worked for a radical transformation of Ethiopia, only one escaped arrest, imprisonment, torture, execution or assassination. The revolution swallowed the whole of the young generation of Ethiopian intellectuals.⁷

In attempting to analyze the reasons why Western scholars paid little attention to the great social significance and theoretical importance of the Ethiopian Revolution, Clapham finds circumstantial reasons, including the limited familiarity of Western scholars with Ethiopian realities and the difficulty in attaining accurate information about the country. Also, social cataclysms due to prolonged civil wars and recurring famines have eclipsed the extent and depth of the social changes. According to Clapham, though, the main reason is the "persistent reluctance on the part of Western Marxists to regard Ethiopia as a case of 'genuine' revolutionary socialist development."⁸ How else is one to explain the neglect of Ethiopia's transformation when leftist circles in the West make so much fuss about revolutions in such countries as Algeria, Libya, Mozambique, etc., where the extent of the changes comes nowhere near the Ethiopian mutation? The main reason does not seem to be lack of interest, but rather misinformation leading to the belief that what was occurring in Ethiopia was not a radical revolution. In addition, many Western Marxists were already sympathetic to the Eritrean cause of independence, and so they based their opinion on what Eritrean insurgents were saying about the Ethiopian Revolution.

Are the above reasons enough to explain the little interest of Western scholars in Ethiopia and its transformation? Scholars nurturing doubts about the socialist nature of the Ethiopian transformation would suggest that Clapham is not telling the whole story. Many Western scholars, including Marxist ones, became suspicious and unconvinced of revolutionary developments in Ethiopia because of the history of the Ethiopian Revolution. The military regime seized power and established itself as an absolute authority by virtually destroying the civilian left, which was the revolutionary force of the country. The annihilation of revolutionaries prevented the social upheaval from going in the direction of genuine radical changes. Though transformations have occurred, these transformations do not deserve the name of socialism since their most visible outcome was the extermination of leftist forces. Such a regime, the opponents say, is no more, no less than "a fascist military dictatorship."⁹

The fact of a military dictatorship claiming to implement a genuine socialist program was already enough to trigger suspicion. Apart from exterminating the revolutionaries, the members of the military clique that controlled power did not have a prior ideological commitment to socialism; nor did they show any ten-

dency to support popular struggles. Repression of popular mobilizations and demands has been their most consistent attitude from the start. In light of this repressive policy, one can safely maintain that the effected changes, whatever their magnitude, cannot "transform a conventional military force into a revolutionary vanguard capable of leading a quasi-feudal society toward socialism."¹⁰

Besides questioning the socialist commitment of the military, many scholars have also challenged Clapham's qualification of the Ethiopian Revolution as a fairly successful experience. The Revolution did not register outcomes that match the realizations of the great classical revolutions. Instead of growth, for instance, the country underwent a sharp economic decline, causing a general deterioration in conditions of life. The reorganization of the political structure did not produce a stronger central state either; on the contrary, the state was so weakened that it progressively lost control of some important regions and was finally defeated by insurgents from these liberated regions. These failures revealed the Revolution's inability to efficiently mobilize the working people for the purpose of defending the Revolution and achieving higher production outputs, especially in the agricultural sector. Thus, they attest to the gap that developed between the masses and the military leadership.

Let us not forget that a characteristic deficiency also hampered social protests in Ethiopia from the get-go. When the urban uprisings exploded, no political organization existed in Ethiopia that was capable of leading the protests. The popular protests were largely spontaneous and unorganized. Unlike other large upheavals, no revolutionary party with a clear program and ideological commitment assumed the leadership of the social unrest. This absence of a prior organizational and ideological leadership casts doubt on the revolutionary inspiration of the social protests. According to one author:

The Ethiopian revolution was not a movement with a clear political goal trying to implement a given programme, but a series of attempts by weakly organised groups acting out of basically corporate interests to influence the course of events in a way that suited their needs and aspirations.¹¹

To the extent that the leadership shortcoming relates to the important issue of organization and ideological commitment, this gives substance to the idea that the military rulers talked about socialism but implemented a different policy. Once suspicion is raised about the real goal of the radical measures of the Derg, the door is wide open to views that tend to deny the revolutionary nature of the Ethiopian transformations.

The Ethnonationalist Position

Chief among the detractors of the Ethiopian transformations are Oromo scholars with ethnonationalist views. They regard Ethiopia as a colonial empire, established by the Amhara feudal class after Emperor Menilik conquered and subjugated non-Amhara peoples during the scramble for Africa. These ethnonationalist scholars purport that, though the main social problem that precipitated the

overthrow of the imperial regime was the abject fate of the subjugated non-Amhara peoples, the Revolution did not bring about their liberation. On the contrary, the state was further centralized in the name of socialism and made the sole owner of the resources of these peoples by a radical policy of nationalization. What is more, the Amharization of the "colonized" peoples was intensified: enhancing previous practices, the new military regime was "determined to Ethiopianize the colonized nations completely by destroying their culture, identity, and peoplehood through its so-called modernization policies."¹²

The conclusion of this type of analysis is that the socialist nomenclature of the military regime is anything but true. Though the language changed through the adoption of a different ideology, the imperial practices of Amharization and expropriation were actually intensified. In other words, "under Derg control, there have been no changes that constitute transformation."¹³ As a result of the radical measures, the state was neither decentralized nor taken away from the control of the Amhara elite. Still less did these measures allow the "colonized" peoples to take control of their lives and resources. Through the omnipotence of the state, made possible by the socialist ideology, the Amhara elite was able to reach a degree of control and dominance that surpassed by far what the imperial regime had achieved. Clearly, the adoption of the popular ideology of socialism was a device to fool the dominated peoples into believing that the time of equality and freedom had come, when in reality the radical measures were simply consolidating the "colonial" state.

The problem with the ethnonationalist position is that the idea of mere continuity is simply not credible; too much has changed in Ethiopia for this to be the case. To assume that the radical measures have simply consolidated the imperial state is to fly in the face of the structural changes that have altered all the features of the country. The overthrow of the monarchy and of the landed aristocracy is a structural change that seriously undermines the argument according to which the Amhara rule has been strengthened more than ever before. To quote Teshale Tibebu, "the revolution destroyed the power base of the ruling class of the Ge'ez civilization" and its "most important outcome . . . was the rise of the people of the South to public visibility" following the emancipation of southern peasants from tenancy, thanks to the nationalization of all rural land.¹⁴ The political landscape has also been altered significantly by the rise of a new multiethnic elite in place of the exclusive aristocracy.

As to the accusation that state centralization has been enhanced, the argument cannot be used to discredit the revolutionary developments of the country. History shows that centralization has been a consistent goal of revolutionaries, who used state power to consolidate the national territory and effect radical transformations. As Clapham reminds us, "the central goal of revolutionary leaders . . . is to take over the state structure established by their predecessors and to use it, suitably adapted, as an agency for economic development, national integration, and the consolidation of their own power."¹⁵ In this regard, Ethiopia is not a discrepant case: for Ethiopian revolutionaries, too, the centralized use of the state meant the consolidation of national unity through the elimination of

class barriers and the promotion of economic development and ideological uniformity. One can question the validity of the strategy to achieve economic and democratic advancements but not its conformity to revolutionary conceptions.

The Fascism of the Derg

Closely related to the ethnonationalist stand is the position of those scholars who tie the revolutionary measures of the Derg to the needs of a dictatorial rule. Because such scholars are most sensitive to the elimination of the civilian left, they readily characterize the military regime as a fascistic and counterrevolutionary rule. Two prominent representatives of this line of thinking are John Markakis and Nega Ayele, who write:

Discarding pretences, the military government used massive violence against the vanguard of the popular movement; that is, the radical intelligentsia, labour activists and students. In trying to blunt its spearhead, the regime was undermining the movement and was performing, therefore, a counter-revolutionary task.¹⁶

Markakis maintains that popular uprisings with legitimate grievances had initiated a revolutionary process. But the rise of the Derg and the subsequent suppression and elimination of revolutionary forces stopped the process and morphed it into counterrevolution. The main reason for the Derg to seize power was to prevent the revolutionary forces from capturing state power. For this purpose, the Derg used fascistic methods of suppression, but it also appropriated some of the demands of the revolutionaries (such as land reform), to gain legitimacy.

The main leftist opposition to the Derg, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), fully endorsed the counterrevolutionary role of the Derg. The adoption of a fascist policy was necessary to monopolize power so as to reverse the tide of history. *Challenge*, the Journal of the World-Wide Union of Ethiopian Students, described the Derg as "the fascist military junta that slyly encroached the seizure of state power to itself and established a counter-revolutionary regime totally inconceivable to the fundamental interests and aspirations of the masses."¹⁷ The implementation of some populist measures concealed the real purpose of the Derg, and so eased the reversal of the social trend. These measures gave legitimacy to the Derg while strengthening its grip on the country. The real purpose of the policy of nationalizations is thus quite clear: the Derg justified and achieved absolute power on everything in the name of the popular ideology of socialism, thereby concealing its counterrevolutionary agenda.

The major drawback of the position denouncing fascism and counterrevolution is its implausibility. For one thing, the measures taken by the Derg were totally uncharacteristic of a fascistic policy. As one previous member of the EPRP concedes, "fascism was applied to the Ethiopian situation by superficial analogy and without any analytical reasoning. It did not carry much convic-

tion."¹⁸ For another, the thesis of counterrevolution creates the impression that the Derg squashed an imminent socialist revolution. Such an assumption is highly questionable, and even more questionable is the belief that revolution could have occurred without the Derg. The civilian left was too weak and too divided into rival groups to be able to institute a government of its own. Moreover, without the Derg, it would have been difficult to overthrow the imperial regime, and even harder to prevent a conservative military coup, there being no doubt that, at that time, "the left had no center of leadership and no central organ to coordinate the struggle."¹⁹

Socialism as Nationalism

The uncertain commitment of the military to the ideology they professed, as opposed to the resilience of their nationalist allegiance, has led some authors to conclude that socialism was a cover-up for a nationalist policy. More than the commitment to social equality, the military were nationalists, both by profession and personal conviction. In effect, the primary declaration of the Derg expressed a resounding nationalist commitment and deliberately avoided any reference to socialism. As a scholar notes:

Although the *Dirgue* was from 1975 onwards to parade itself to the outside world as the champion of Marxism-Leninism in Africa, it is vital to remember that its *coup d'état* was based on a solid bourgeois and nationalist platform, epitomized in its slogan *Ethiopia Tikdem*, or "Ethiopia First."²⁰

And nothing of what the Derg said and accomplished later on ever questioned the initial nationalist stand. The nationalization of all lands and industries falls under the category of consistent nationalism pursuing a radical policy of integration and nation-building. Moreover, it endows the state with sweeping power, the very kind of power necessary to initiate economic development through "the formation of State Capitalism."²¹ The socialism of the Derg was a disguise; in reality the Derg established state capitalism, which of course required the elimination of the civilian left.

The main weakness of the thesis of socialism as a cover-up to promote state capitalism is that it creates a false dichotomy between nationalism and socialism. The story behind the conversion of many Third World intellectuals to socialism assigns great weight to the frustration of nationalist feelings. Many intellectuals became Marxist radicals because socialism appeared to them as the most consistent nationalist stand. It is not clear why the young officers who took control of the state would have to fake socialism to promote a nationalist agenda when the two ideologies have so much in common. Another weakness of the theory is the lack of credibility. The very association of the Derg with capitalism, of any kind, sounds discordant. Neither the petty bourgeoisie, nor the merchants, nor even state bureaucrats have gained any appreciable advantages from the measures taken by the Derg. None of them had the slightest hint that some form of capitalism was being built in Ethiopia. By contrast, the Derg's nationali-

zation of urban and rural land, industries, banks, insurance companies, etc., have entirely wiped out the landed nobility, as well as the nascent bourgeoisie, just as they have altered the life conditions of lower classes. As much as the structural nature of the change is undeniable, its alleged capitalist inspiration sounds highly dubious.

The Middle Course Position

Unable to deny the depth of Ethiopia's transformations, some scholars steer a middle course between those who deny the reality of the Revolution and those who applaud it for its authenticity. Among them we find John Haberson, who suggests the term "transformation" as a better qualification than the term "revolution." For him, the term "revolution" has a normative connotation that is not fully relevant to the Ethiopian case, while "transformation" carries a more neutral meaning. What this means is that deep transformations have indeed occurred, but not all of them yielded positive results. Stated otherwise, "the Ethiopian transformation in some respects does, and in other does not, merit designation as a revolution with the normative connotations the term carries."²² While in terms of social transformation changes "fundamentally different from and very much better than those existing prior to 1974" were introduced, the downsides were no less far-reaching.²³ First, in regards to the improvement of conditions of life, the "new structures have not brought more favorable socio-economic results."²⁴ Second, the foundations of the state have been dangerously weakened rather than strengthened, for "despite the professed objectives of the participants, the post-imperial Ethiopian transformation has taken a course that has seriously undermined instead of strengthening those *state* foundations."²⁵

Though not appealing to a similar distinction between "revolution" and "transformation," Andargachew Tiruneh, a serious Ethiopian analyst of the Revolution, has also denied the qualification of revolution on the ground that the change did not produce social improvements. "The transformation undergone by Ethiopia is not," he argues, "progressive and, therefore, not a social revolution," the understanding being that when a social revolution occurs, "the changed mode of production is essentially more progressive than the one it replaces."²⁶ Let alone being progressive, the so-called Revolution was a backward movement both politically and economically. A more repressive regime replaced the imperial state, and economic productivity dropped from what it used to be in the previous regime. In particular, the Derg "has put an end to the development of the emerging commercial farms which certainly were extremely efficient in terms of raising productivity."²⁷

The middle course position becomes shaky when we see the transformations from the viewpoint of those who were mistreated by the *ancien regime*. For the millions of peasants who were freed from tenancy, the transformations had the value of revolution in that those transformations unmistakably altered their lives for the better. Furthermore, the combination of positive and negative outcomes defines any revolution so that the reluctance to characterize the Ethio-

pian transformations as revolution does not seem fair. Because all the promises of the Revolution were not realized and many shortcomings were observed, and also because an intense and violent struggle developed between revolutionary forces, it is wrong to conclude that it was not a real revolution. These failings are not unique to the Ethiopian Revolution. As stated by Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, "while revolutions can transform for the better the lived conditions of the oppressed, no revolution produces a perfect society, or the one that most of those who participate in it expect at first to see: the Ethiopian revolution is no exception to this generalization."²⁸

Neither the Russian nor the Chinese Revolutions achieved democracy and freedom, nor did they realize full equality and universal economic prosperity. All their achievements were marred by severe shortcomings. True, the achievements of the Ethiopian Revolution are not comparable with the Chinese and Soviet advancements. Still, the measurement of achievements must take into consideration the disparity of conditions when the revolutions broke out and the particular and contingent ordeals each revolution had to face. Because Ethiopia was even more backward socially and technologically than Russia when the upheaval erupted, the construction of socialism was destined to stumble along the way, for the hurdles were greater.

The Ethiopian Case as a Challenge

Seeing the major role of the Derg and its populist inspiration in a context of social rebellion devoid of organized leadership, many observers have inferred the lack of applicability of Leninist formulas to the Ethiopian case. Short of standard classification, a Western Ethiopianist, Rene Lefort, has come up with the term "heretical revolution." The anomaly of a radical revolution occurring without the leadership of a revolutionary party explains the initial vacillations of the Derg and the hesitation of the socialist camp to openly come out in support of the Ethiopian Revolution. "Moscow remained very reticent towards a revolution which did not fit into the tried and tested Marxist schemas,"²⁹ says Lefort. The concept of "heresy" does not remove the initial incongruities any more than it denies the attribute of revolution because some established formula was not respected. Instead, it leaves the question open: it recognizes the unusual nature of the military leadership but does not prejudge its possible outcome. For Lefort, whether it was a heresy or not, "the future alone will judge."³⁰

Lefort's wait-and-see position and the controversy over the nature of the Ethiopian transformations clearly indicate that we are dealing with a special case in which basic ingredients of revolutionary transformations coexist with unusual, if not discrepant, components. The most important incongruity is undoubtedly the role of the Derg as a military entity. The Derg overthrew the *ancien regime* and implemented radical socialist measures while eliminating the civilian left, which had advocated these same measures. Grasping the reasons why the Derg was increasingly radicalized to the point of appropriating the program of a highly radicalized civil left should be the first concern of any scholarly attempt

to understand the Ethiopian Revolution. The concern amounts to asking how the conflict of social forces created the groundwork for the formation of the Derg and its rapid promotion as the most powerful antagonist to civilian and other military groups. Only when we situate the Derg in these conflicts can we begin to theorize about the Revolution.

The best way to undertake such a task is first ask whether the major theories of revolution have a provision for the type of discrepancies that occurred in Ethiopia. Before speaking of "counterrevolution," "transformation," "heresy," or "state capitalism," not only is it necessary to make sure that the Ethiopian Revolution exhibits the major characteristics by which revolutions are generally defined, but also to know whether the Ethiopian discrepancies can be reduced to the level of local variations that fall short of invalidating the fundamentals of revolution. In the case where no such provision is found, the alternative is either to deny that a revolution took place or to call for a reexamination of existing theories.

If we start by saying that military men are congenitally unable to espouse a socialist ideology, the inescapable conclusion is that the transformations of the Ethiopian social landscape are anything but revolutionary. We have seen how such a conclusion, in whichever way it is argued, comes up against important facts. The best approach is to look into the major theories of revolution with the view of accommodating the Ethiopian anomalies. As one author remarks, "despite the fact that the army played . . . the central role, it would be wrong to regard the change simply as a *coup d'état* which replaced one authoritarian régime with another."³¹ Despite many inconsistencies, the fact remains that both the depth of the changes and their social fallouts rank the Ethiopian transformations among the most radical revolutions.

If we manage to see the Ethiopian Revolution as a special case of a general pattern, our understanding will be theoretically sound with the added input of an enriched conception of revolutions. If the effort fails because the anomalies are too important to fit into a general formula, then the existing theories must be deconstructed and a new theoretical framework liable to include the Ethiopian deviations must be sought. Otherwise, the attempt to theorize about revolutions must be dropped in favor of a narrative approach underlining contingencies.

The challenge is not a new one: for instance, the peculiarities of the Ethiopian Revolution bring to mind Iran's deviations in some components of revolutionary change. Instead of revolutionary intellectuals, Islamic clerics, who upheld a premodern ideological outlook, assumed the leadership of a radical change that overthrew a government still in full control of its repressive apparatus. The prominent theoretician of revolutions, Theda Skocpol, frankly admits that the discrepant nature of the Iranian Revolution "challenged expectations about revolutionary causation that [she] developed through comparative-historical research on the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions."³² My contention is that the Ethiopian Revolution poses no less challenging questions about the causes and the uneven directions of revolutions. The only difference is that, while important Western scholars of revolution have reflected on the Irani-

an Revolution, they have literally ignored the Ethiopian Revolution, even though, unlike the Iranian clerics, the Derg had adopted the secular and modernist ideology of socialism.

The next chapter will review the main theories of revolution with the view of assessing to what extent their explanation of revolutions enlightens the Ethiopian case. In particular, it will try to detect whether their interpretation leaves an opening for something like the intervention of the Derg, that is, for an *ad hoc* intrusion suddenly propelling a social situation of protest toward a radical path.

Notes

1. *Derg* is an Amharic word for committee or council. It designates the Coordinating Committee of the armed forces that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie on September 12, 1974 and seized power under the title of Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC).
2. Christopher Clapham, "Revolutionary Socialist Development in Ethiopia," *African Affairs* 86, no. 343 (April 1987): 151.
3. Clapham, "Revolutionary Socialist Development," 151.
4. Clapham, "Revolutionary Socialist Development," 165.
5. Crawford Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 69.
6. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983), 14.
7. Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* trans. A. M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), 257.
8. Clapham, "Revolutionary Socialist Development in Ethiopia," 151.
9. Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa*, 11.
10. John Markakis, "Garrison Socialism: the Case of Ethiopia," *MERIP Reports*, no. 79 (June 1979): 10.
11. Marina Ottaway, "Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (Sept. 1976): 470.
12. Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 118.
13. Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1990), 400.
14. Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1995), 168.
15. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.
16. John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1986), 146.
17. "The National Democratic Revolution in Ethiopia," *Challenge* 14, no. 1 (March 1975): ii.
18. Kiflu Tadesse, *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party* (Silver Spring: The Independent Publishers, 1993), 191.
19. Kiflu, *The Generation*, 119.
20. Michael Chege, "The Revolution Betrayed: Ethiopia, 1974-9," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 17, no. 3 (September 1979): 369.

21. Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), 112.
22. John W. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post-Imperial State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 10.
23. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation*, 9.
24. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation*, 225.
25. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation*, 15.
26. Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 343.
27. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 341.
28. Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 13.
29. Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* 186.
30. Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* 60.
31. Ottaway, "Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution," 469.
32. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 240.

Theories of Revolution and the Ethiopian Discrepancies

To assess the applicability of existing theories of revolution to the case of Ethiopia, I first provide a summary of the main concepts by which each school defines and analyzes revolutions and then examine the various criticisms labeled against the theory, as well as the challenges that the Ethiopian Revolution poses to its explanation. Once a clear assessment of what the theory can and cannot explain about the Ethiopian Revolution is reached, the study moves to the next school and examines it according to the same procedure. The chapter concludes with a general assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of existing theories when they grapple with the Ethiopian Revolution.

The general consensus among theoreticians of revolution distinguishes five major schools that present an original approach to revolutions. They are: (1) the theory of relative deprivation, which gives the central role to the psychological phenomenon of frustration; (2) the functionalist-structural approach that focuses on disequilibrium in social systems; (3) the Marxist-Leninist theory with mode of production and class struggle as central concepts; (4) state-centered approaches with the central issue being the breakdown of the state; and (5) political conflict theory, which emphasizes elite competition. What constitutes the originality of each school is not so much the discovery of a new causal phenomenon as the characterization of one variable as the decisive factor for the eruption of revolutions. We begin with the theory of "relative deprivation" for the simple reason that many studies maintain that the Ethiopian Revolution was caused by popular discontents over economic downturns.

Theory of Relative Deprivation

For the theoreticians of relative deprivation, the basic defining feature of revolution is the change of the existing social order by violent means. We speak of revolution when illegal or unconstitutional methods are used to overthrow a given social system. However, in view of *coups d'état* being the use of illegal means, the definition must specify that, unlike *coups d'état*, revolutions normally target the complete dismantling and replacement of the old order. Also, violence involving the masses seems to define revolutions, as opposed to *coups d'état*, which are instigated by smaller groups. Evidently, only the involvement of the masses can bring about a change of the existing system such that it imposes a redistribution of power and wealth. Accordingly, "a political revolution is not merely an illegal change of government, but one that is brought about with the collaboration and support of a relatively large portion of the population, not just a few leaders or 'influentials' at the top of the political pyramid."¹

Given this fundamental aspect, explaining revolutions is nothing more than grasping the causes that drive the masses to violent behavior against the existing social system. Here, a characteristic difficulty arises: if we say the masses become violent because they are oppressed and mistreated, we face the objection that the state of oppression and mistreatment is their normal, habitual condition. Perpetual deficiency in the satisfaction of needs is the objective condition of the masses, the usual life they are accustomed to accept. To imply that people rebel because they are exploited and are lacking rivals the fact that revolutions are exceptional events. The issue, then, is to know what moves people from a protracted resignation to a sudden rebellion.

One thing is sure: violence is associated with anger. However, the answer to the question of why the masses become angry cannot be found in the social conditions of poverty. Instead, we have to look for a cause that pushed them out of their usual resignation. Either they did not get what they were promised or they cannot have what they used to have. Rebellion breaks out when a negative change in people's life activates the psychological factor of frustration. The key word is "frustration," not "poverty," for as says James C. Davies, a prominent thinker of relative deprivation, "far from making people into revolutionaries, enduring poverty makes for concern with one's solitary self or solitary family at best and resignation or mute despair at worst."² When people do not get what they expect, they experience frustration, and so become angry and susceptible to violent protests. If people do not expect anything, the usual attitude of resignation protects them from frustration, however wretched their conditions of life may be. What sets apart theoreticians of relative deprivation is, therefore, their accentuated tendency to see "the roots of revolution in the state of mind of the masses; they considered revolutions to be likely only when the masses enter a cognitive state of 'frustration' or 'deprivation' relative to some set of goals."³

It is not difficult to see what kind of regime is most likely to cause frustration. In a society where mechanisms exist to appease frustration, the likelihood

of violent protest is considerably decreased. Thus, in a democratic society, people find peaceful means to air their grievances and exert pressure on the government to make some changes. The recourse to violence, and consequently, the eruption of revolution are unlikely in this kind of society. By contrast, the threat of political violence "is most likely to occur in societies that rely on coercion to maintain order in lieu of providing adequate patterns of value-satisfying action."⁴ Why? Because in coercive regimes, the inevitable discontents are not allowed peaceful expressions, and people have no choice but to resort to political violence. Let it not be forgotten, however, that the condition for political violence being the surfacing of the mental state of frustration, a coercive regime by itself is not enough to cause frustration. For the latter to occur, there must be a negative change that deprives the masses of their expectations. Among the causes liable to produce frustration, we can cite economic downturns resulting in sudden shortages or price rises for basic goods. Declining employment opportunities or a new tax system that disproportionately burdens one class can be equally frustrating.

Interestingly, the occasion to cause frustration intensifies with regimes that undertake reforms or go through a phase of economic prosperity. These changes have the characteristic effect of raising expectations which, if unsatisfied, can activate intense frustrations. In particular, if prolonged prosperity is suddenly interrupted by a reversal, the level of frustration can rise so high that political violence becomes inevitable. In the words of Davies, "revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal."⁵ This paradox of revolutions occurring in societies that undergo a certain economic growth highlights the primary role of frustration. The growth has the effect of arousing expectations, thereby causing intense discontents at the slightest reversal.

According to Alexis de Tocqueville, economic growth triggering an increase of popular expectations was at the root of the eruption of the French Revolution. Rejecting the prevailing view that economic decline and lack of reforms caused the French Revolution, Tocqueville shows that France had achieved remarkable economic growth, with the consequence that people began to make more demands on the system. In particular, the prosperity had sharpened the appetites of the lower classes, thus exposing them to increasing disappointment with royal absolutism. The latter's protection of noble privileges, notably of tax exemption, appeared as an anachronism that blocked the fair distribution of the benefits of accrued prosperity. With modernization putting increased burdens on the state, the maintenance of tax exemptions—even as the government needed more revenue—could only intensify France's financial crisis. The only remedy was to increase taxes on the masses, which heightened frustration and set the stage for political violence. Tocqueville underlines the disruptive potential of social reforms thus:

It is not always in going from bad to worse that one falls into revolution. It more often happens that a people who have borne without complaint, as if they did not feel them, the most burdensome laws, reject them violently once their

weight is lightened. The regime that a revolution destroys is almost always better than the one that immediately preceded it, and experience teaches that the most dangerous moment for a bad government is usually when it begins to reform itself.⁶

The Russian Revolution was another pertinent confirmation of the theory of relative deprivation. To understand the eruption of that revolution, it is necessary to place it in the context of the increasing prosperity that had taken place since Peter the Great had initiated the process of Russia's modernization. In addition to the adoption of a policy of forceful industrialization so as to catch up with European countries, a major highlight of the attempt to modernize Russia was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. These pre-revolutionary developments support "the view that 1861 to 1905 was the period of rising expectations that preceded the 1917 revolution."⁷ However, though expectations were stirred up, satisfaction did not follow suit. The emancipation soon led to aggravated frustration: as peasants could not find enough free land, they were forced to either rent or buy land or migrate to towns in search of work. The emancipation was not followed by the reduction of the privileges of the nobility, which still controlled much land. More importantly, the Tsarist regime undertook reforms, albeit without renouncing absolutism; it "sought to maintain its absolutist principle by conceding reform without accepting anything like democratic authority."⁸ As a result of these major hurdles, frustration grew, and with it came the criticism of the social system. Frustration reached its peak when the Russian army encountered defeat in 1917 against the German army at a time of high discontent over inflation and shortage of basic goods. The rising expectations that appeared as a result of the modernizing measures were held down by the absolutist regime, and this intensified discontent leading to the uprisings of February 1917.

Critique of Relative Deprivation Theory

Let us begin by admitting that most scholars criticize the theory, not because frustration is irrelevant, but because it is not enough to explain revolution. On the other hand, some critics particularly reject the appeal to a psychological condition which, on top of being very difficult to measure objectively, gives primacy to human subjectivity over objective factors. They find frustration too subjective a state to be able to play a decisive causal role.

The immediate question is indeed: When does frustration reach the high point of inciting violent behavior? Obviously, there exists here the empirical problem of measuring a subjective state, that is, of knowing at which level of intensity frustration causes violence. We are left with qualitative evaluations, such as "'high level' of cognitive frustration," with the specific deficiency being that they "are incapable of denoting exactly when a potentially revolutionary situation has arisen."⁹ To the question of when the masses reach the level of

frustration that will induce violence, such vague and imponderable designations as "high," "deep," or "intense" are of little help to determine the likelihood of an uprising.

Apart from the difficulty of measuring the level of frustration that can induce violent behavior, "the most devastating flaw" of the theory is "the in-built assumption that intensified grievances would transmute readily into insurrection."¹⁰ How could it be so when we know that the masses, although otherwise in a state of constant need, deprivation, and anger, rarely resort to violent attacks on the state? The theory seems to overlook the simple fact that the permanence of deprivation entails an underlying state of constant frustration. True, short-term economic crises can exacerbate the frustration, thereby making the masses angrier. Even so, however, the masses very often do not translate their anger into violent behavior. Facts show that repressive regimes continue to rule for decades, despite the increasing frustration of the masses. Accordingly, the main issue is not the intensity of the frustration, but rather the question of why, at one point, that frustration turns into riots. In a word, the theory does not explain why revolutions are rare and why, even when discontent is high, insurrection seldom breaks out.

Rather than the intensity of frustration, we must ponder the conditions that create the suitability for rebellion. The masses revolt not only because the level of their frustration is high, but also because they see some opportunity for success. The importance given to the revolutionary intention activated by deceived expectations completely misses the common situation when the masses refrain from using violence for the simple reason that they fear the repressive power of the state. People can be highly frustrated and angry, and still may not rebel simply because the price is too high or the risk is too great. Put otherwise, the rebellious response of the masses depends on "the weakening of repression, above all of state repression," which should therefore become the primary explanation.¹¹ The structural condition affecting the repressive power of the state is the decisive factor, not the level of frustration.

The inability to explain why revolutions are rare when heightened grievances are so common points to "voluntarism" as the major weakness of the theory.¹² To promote frustration to the level of a primary cause, the factor of human intent must take precedence over objective conditions. Voluntarism assumes that when demands are not met, people rebel regardless of objective conditions. Had revolutions been triggered by frustrated expectations, not only would they have been less infrequent, but they also would have been fairly predictable, even provokable. Yet

never has a revolutionary movement, or even a vanguard party or a mass movement, single-handedly made a revolutionary situation that catapulted them to political power. The situation is structural, and the behavior of individuals or groups can only be comprehensible in those terms.¹³

There is more to the matter than the ineffectiveness of voluntarism. The fact that the masses rebel does not necessarily mean revolution is on the way. It is

one thing to explain violence and riots; it is quite another to explain revolution, that is, violence resulting in profound social changes. Even if we agree to define revolution by its violent feature, it must be specified that the violence is of the type "resulting not just in violent destruction of a polity, but also in the emergence of new sociopolitical arrangements."¹⁴ In other words, the theory of relative deprivation is unable to differentiate between riots or rebellions and revolutions. Frustrations can explain riots, not revolutions. Revolt is a violent protest; revolution, on the other hand, is more than a violent protest: it is a remaking of society. The difference is not only in the intensity of the protest, but also in the objective and outcomes of that protest.

The remaking of society requires the intervention of participants with alternative social visions. Such participants do not belong to the masses, obvious as it is that the remaking of society appeals to a theoretical activity that is outside the competence of ordinary people. Insurrection becomes revolution when people endowed with alternative visions take up the leadership of the movement. The violence of the masses does not alter the social system; the most it can do is to wrest some minor reforms from the ruling elite. This is so true that Ted Gurr, himself an influential thinker of the theory of relative deprivation, admits the insufficiency of frustration when he writes, "The primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, second the politicization of that discontent, and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors."¹⁵ And as politicization occurs when people with an alternative vision of social order assume the leadership of the social discontent, it is inconsistent to assign the primary role to popular frustration. The latter is important in the phase of rebellion, which changes into revolution only under the condition that rival elites take up the organizational and ideological leadership of the rebellion.

When applied to the case of Ethiopia, the theory of relative deprivation does not seem relevant at first look. The Ethiopian case does not show a period of economic prosperity followed by a sudden recession. During the imperial regime, the Ethiopian economy grew at a very slow pace and had all the uneven, shabby characteristics of underdevelopment. With the exception of the educated elite, which was threatened by rising unemployment, we cannot speak of rising expectations that went unsatisfied, as Ethiopian society did not experience any noticeable economic boom. Even so, it is undeniable that a sharp discontent with economic life triggered the social protests that initiated the Revolution.

The way out is to say that, even though people had no rising expectations, they were put in a condition of not being able to even preserve the little they had. We can thus use the concept of frustration: rather than a reversal of growth, the deterioration of conditions of life as a result of adverse occurrences on the international scene caused the frustration. The closing of the Suez Canal after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 had already harmfully impacted on the export/import of goods. OPEC's dramatic rise of oil prices in 1973 was a fatal blow to an economy already suffering from a state of aggravated sluggishness. The infla-

tion that followed severely affected the ability of the urban population to maintain its previous level of existence. Although the masses were without expectation, this critical deterioration of their conditions of life no doubt provoked frustration.

The nature of the crisis perfectly accords with an important feature of the Ethiopian Revolution, namely, that it was essentially an urban uprising with Addis Ababa at the center of protest. The rural population was not directly affected by the oil crisis, and so did not participate in the early and crucial phases of the uprising, even though abject poverty was the defining feature of its existence. Shielded from the fluctuations of world economy and the repercussions of inflation by a subsistence economy, the rural population was largely resigned to its wretched fate. Another important insight of the theory of relative deprivation is the active role of the educated elite in the rebellion. The term "frustration" properly applies to this category of people, given that in the developing world, "literacy and Western education are . . . major sources of rising expectations."¹⁶ This is exactly what happened in Ethiopia: exposure to modern education had induced rising expectations that were shattered by the economic crisis, most notably the fear of unemployment.

Despite these insights, the focus on frustration springing from economic downturns is patently insufficient to explain the fall of Haile Selassie. The huge puzzle here is not the explosion of widespread protests, but the inability of the imperial regime to quell the protests. This inability originated from the unprecedented situation of a long-venerated emperor steadily losing the loyalty of his armed forces. More than any other similar cases, the Ethiopian Revolution highlights the factor of state breakdown as a major cause of revolution. Frustration was indeed rampant for quite some time; the new element in 1974 was the regime's inability to control the armed forces. As soon as the armed forces showed their reluctance to defend the regime, the system collapsed without recourse to violence.

Now, can we not attribute the breakdown of loyalty of military people to frustration caused by the economic crisis? The military—especially soldiers—are not immune from economic recession, as shown by the fact that the first mutinies against the imperial regime reflected complaints about life conditions. Doubtless frustration must have played a role, but even that does not thoroughly explain the depletion of allegiance for the major reason that the military have, in the past, been quite successful at imposing their demands on the regime. The emperor did everything to satisfy the military each time they protested: he often raised their salaries and offered to improve their living conditions, thereby demonstrating how special his treatment of the military was. The grievances of the military, however intense, were thus not durable; better still, they were often used to extract further concessions.

What was new in 1974 was that the armed forces betrayed the Emperor, and his top generals were unable to reinstate their control. Instead of returning to their barracks after the satisfaction of demands as they often had in the past, they started to articulate political demands. The rapid transition of the armed forces

from the mere expression of economic grievances to politicization is, therefore, the new and important issue that needs elucidation.

To recapitulate, the Ethiopian Revolution allows limited use of the theory of relative deprivation. The latter definitely shows how, as a result of economic downturns, urban centers rose against the regime, but this situation of social rebellion does not explain the collapse of the regime. It especially fails to show why the regime lost the fidelity of the armed forces. Since the depletion of the loyalty of the armed forces implicates the issue of authority more than the spur of grievances, most notably in the case of a traditional monarchy, let us see whether the erosion of legitimacy rather than the incitement of intensified complaints better accounts for the collapse of the regime.

The Value/System Approach to Revolution

Frustration, we said, may explain demonstrations and protests, but not revolutions, which target a different social order. According to the value/system approach or "the functionalist school," as it is sometimes called, social protests become revolutionary when the ruling class and the state lose the legitimacy to rule. The statement seems to ring of common sense since "governments and political systems . . . function well as long as the people ruled by them recognized their legitimacy—that is, their rightful claim to rule."¹⁷ The basic question we must answer is how and why a political system forfeits legitimacy.

The value/system theory agrees with the theory of relative deprivation on the definition of revolutions as violent changes. What distinguishes revolution is not so much its radical outcome as the use of violence to bring about the change. Social transformation can be radical without being revolutionary, as in the case of Japan's transition from feudalism to a modern society. The change was radical but not revolutionary because of the absence of a violent overthrow of the Japanese political system. In the words of Chalmers Johnson, the most influential thinker of value/system theory, "revolutionary change is a special kind of social change, one that involves the intrusion of violence into civil society relations."¹⁸ What else does this eruption of violence indicate but the breakdown of legitimacy since, according to Max Weber, the monopoly of legitimate violence primarily defines the state?¹⁹ Revolution is precisely the instance when the state surrenders that monopoly because the citizens reclaim their natural right to use violence to assert their interests.

The fact that revolution amounts to a return to the state of nature shows that the state's monopoly of violence is a necessary component of social organization. Since no natural or rationally established division of labor presides over the organization of human societies, coercion is necessary to separate those who rule from those who are ruled. Still, coercion is only one aspect; it must work in tandem with the belief that the separation realizes a common good. This justification of the social division of labor is as essential to the social order as the state's power of violence. The social order is not maintained by means of coer-

cion only, but also by the belief that social inequalities are necessary and beneficial to the entire community, and hence, that they are legitimate. The interpretation "stresses that society is a 'moral community,' a collectivity of people who share certain 'definitions of the situation' (called 'values'), which legitimize the inequalities of social organization and cause people to accept them as morally justified."²⁰ The moral justification for social action and stratification is backed by religious, mythical, and metaphysical beliefs. The system of value that justifies both social inequalities and the state's monopoly of violence is, therefore, constitutive of the social order.

So long as the value system is intact, the state and the ruling class conserve their legitimacy, and this rules out the use of violence. In such situations, people use means other than violence to express their grievances, however frustrated they may be. By contrast, if the system of beliefs justifying the use of violence and social inequalities is undermined, revolution is on the horizon. In other words, "the prime characteristic of revolutionary conditions . . . is the 'loss of authority.'"²¹ The preservation of authority is necessary to maintain the submission of the civil society, but even more so to conserve the loyalty of the repressive power of the state. Unless shared justifications uphold the use of coercion, the state cannot obtain unconditional obedience from its police and army. Consequently, revolution is unlikely "where the authority of the body politic is truly intact, and this means, under modern conditions, where the armed forces can be trusted to obey the civil authorities."²² But when the state relies exclusively on force, the repressive apparatus of the social system is no longer dependable, and this increases the likelihood of revolution.

What this means is clear enough: the stability and the effective functioning of the social system depend on the harmony between the value system and the various components of the social organization. When the component parts work in harmony, the system achieves a systematic equilibrium, but if discrepancy sets in, the system loses its equilibrium and becomes dysfunctional. In particular, if the operations of the political system are at odds with dominant values, provided certain facilitating conditions are realized, revolution becomes likely so that the "essential, defining factor of a revolutionary situation is a state of severe disequilibrium in the society."²³ Once disequilibrium takes root, resulting in the loss of legitimacy of those who control power, the system is at the mercy of incidents, and this easily generates into protests and riots. Among the catalysts or accelerators, we find defeat in war, natural disaster, economic setback, and so on. These incidents are not the real cause of the revolution; they simply give expression to the deeper disenchantment already undermining the system.

What causes a social system to move out of equilibrium and become dysfunctional by generating a tension between the value system and the social order? Johnson suggests that the causes can be either exogenous or endogenous. Endogenous causes pertain to internal innovations, as in the case of a technological breakthrough or cultural transformation. The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment are examples of endogenous causes that elicited important value changes. This type of changes requires the transformation of the

social order in accordance with the new beliefs. For instance, a new sense of human dignity can demand a redefinition of rights and, hence, a redistribution of wealth and power. Exogenous causes refer to the demonstration effect of cultural or technological innovations from neighboring countries. In particular, as Johnson emphasizes, "the effect of foreign education and travel on many students from European colonies was primarily to alter their values."²⁴

The focus on the value system shows the great importance that the functionalist approach accords to ideological issues. A new religion or a new social ideology can foster a revolutionary situation, as it undermines the ideological bonds existing between the masses and the ruling elite. The loss of legitimacy of the ruling elite soon flows from the breakdown of ideological consensus: what prepares revolution is less the frustration people feel than the prior breach of consensus. Accordingly, "while mass discontent is the crucial factor for explaining revolutions for frustration-aggression theorists, systemic crises and, especially, revolutionary ideology are the key factors for systems/value-consensus theorists."²⁵ Clearly, in stressing the central role of consensus, Johnson corrects the weakness of frustration theory. While the latter can explain protests and riots, he provides the reason why some of these riots turn into revolutions. The intervention of a new ideology, of an alternative social system, prompts people into using violence to destroy the old system so as to implement the sought-after order.

A word of caution: an ideology can become an alternative value structure only if it is relevant to the crisis at hand. To quote Johnson, ideology

becomes salient only under disequilibrated conditions and which is addressed to these disequilibrated conditions. An ideology, in this sense, may evolve into a value structure if it is instrumental in resynchronizing the system; but as an 'ideology' it is always a challenger, an alternative paradigm of values.²⁶

One of the effects of the disequilibrium is that the old value system no longer makes sense to the people. As a result, "people in the society become disoriented, and hence open to conversion to the alternative values proposed by a revolutionary movement."²⁷ Just as it induces the need for new beliefs among the masses, cultural disorientation encourages dissident groups to reinvent values or to be receptive to external ideological deviations. The ability of the new values to reinstate the social equilibrium promotes these groups to the leadership of the social protests. Only when social protests fall under the influence of dissident groups do they become politicized and liable to change into revolutionary upheavals.

One condition can prevent these developments, namely, the readiness of the ruling elite to first recognize the disharmony and then attempt a reorganization of the system in accordance with the emerging needs. "Whether resynchronization or revolution occurs depends, *ceteris paribus*, on the abilities of these leaders, including their ability to perceive that the system is disequilibrated," says Johnson.²⁸ In understanding the need to resynchronize the system, a resolute and farsighted ruling elite can avert the emergence of a revolutionary situation by

performing adequate reforms. However, when the leadership is intransigent, it either denies the disequilibrium or rejects the necessity of reforms. Though sheer repression can help it maintain its position for some time, the longer reforms are deferred, the wider the gap becomes between the old order and the rising value system. In such a delegitimized system, even minor incidents can easily turn into inflammatory riots.

Critique of the Value/System Theory

Critics have no trouble showing that the functionalist theory of revolution falls under the very objections made against the theory of relative deprivation. Rather than substantial differences, what separates the two theories is the use of different terms. Thus, the emphasis on cultural disorientation implicates a psychological factor that is close to frustration theory. In both cases, the causation is psychological, and the only difference is that it is called "disorientation" or "disequilibrium" instead of "frustration." The importance given to the psychological part thus "pushes Johnson back to social-psychological explanations for revolutionary change."²⁹

Both theories also rely on a similar underlying assumption, namely, that governments must satisfy the demands of the people under pain of provoking revolutions. Against Johnson's belief that a state cannot survive for long without value consensus, Theda Skocpol cites the case of the apartheid regime in South Africa, which successfully suppressed popular protests for "fifteen years."³⁰ The assumption that governments rule on the basis of consensus flies in the face of reality. People do not rise against the state because of its legitimacy, but rather because they fear its repressive power. What causes revolution is less the loss of legitimacy than the state's inability to successfully repress.

Let us go further: "systems theories generally overestimate the degree of cohesion and consensus within any society, and underestimate the level of coercive and repressive behavior on the part of any government in maintaining what stability is achieved."³¹ To speak of the social system as an equilibrated system is an obvious exaggeration: fractures and contradictions are inherent in any social organization. What is more, protests can be wide and supported by largely followed ideological movements without thereby being able to overthrow the government. Just as with the theory of relative deprivation, the functionalist approach does not explain why revolutions are rare or why few ideological movements succeed in overthrowing governments. The failure is mostly apparent in Third World countries where consensus is almost absent, as dictatorial regimes rule a good number of these countries.

Are these criticisms of the value/system theory pertinent? One puzzling question is whether or not the weakening of the repressive power of the state can be separated from the loss of its legitimacy. Are not the two aspects congenitally connected? The position that revolution cannot occur without the weakening of the state actually posits the presence of an alternative ideology inspiring contending elites and the masses. More importantly, it is the spread of a rival ideol-

ogy that slowly undermines the loyalty of state functionaries and the armed forces. It is hard to imagine a weakening of the state that does not involve the loss of legitimacy. Thus, a defeat in war will not entail the overthrow of the government if it preserves its authority. So long as people are convinced that everything has been done to secure victory, they will not blame the government for the setback.

The Ethiopian Revolution strongly highlighted the crucial role of legitimacy by exposing the eruption of revolution in a situation where the repressive power of the state was materially intact. Neither defeat in war nor serious internal divisions incapacitated the repressive apparatus of the state. In this condition, the rapid collapse of a venerated regime becomes a true riddle. The only way out is to focus on one undeniable fact: the overthrow of the regime was essentially due to the desertion of the armed forces. As we saw, since material adversities do not fully explain the desertion, there remains the important issue of the loss of legitimacy. The unthinkable happened because that which used to command so much deference had lost its awe. The Ethiopian Revolution occurred because the breakdown of consensus had created a rift between the masses and the ruling elite, but most importantly, between the armed forces and the imperial regime.

The economic downturn caused by the rise of oil prices provoked more than mere demonstrations and riots because of the collapse of consensus. Above all, the economic discontent progressively turned into a rejection of the imperial system under the influence of the radical ideology of socialism propagated by students and intellectuals. Without the intervention of the educated and radicalized sector of the society, the discontent would have not gone beyond mere protests. And what else can explain the ideological ascendancy of students and intellectuals but the cultural divorce between the ruling elite and the larger society? The ideological void created by the breakdown of consensus alone explains why people started to listen to radical students, intellectuals, and young officers.

An analysis of the Ethiopian Revolution in terms of disequilibrium is all the more pertinent because Haile Selassie's society was a tense mixture of traditional values and modern settings. The value system reflected traditional conceptions, especially in regard to the justification of political power, since it referred to an absolutist monarchy adorned with the traditional myth of the emperor as elect of God and dedicated to the protection of the privileges of a landed nobility. The modern sector, however, operated according to the methods and values of the free market. The inevitable consequence of the internal disparity of the system was the blockage of the modern sector, in terms of both economic progress and social mobility. Because the value system and the expanding modern system did meld well, the regime was inherently dysfunctional. The more the modern sector appeared to be held back by a political system championing absolutism and its attendant values, the deeper became the disenchantment that questioned the legitimacy of the system.

The concept of dysfunction reveals one of the strengths of the value/system theory, which is that regimes fall because they become obsolete, that is, "out of touch with the more basic aspirations, values and needs of their societies."³² Haile Selassie's regime was a perfect confirmation of anachronism with the consequence that the slow pace of economic progress was blamed on his absolutism. What is more, circumstances aggravated the crisis of legitimacy. Thus, the old age of the emperor strengthened the belief that nothing more can be expected from the regime. Another salient circumstance was the government's handling of the grave 1974 famine in Wollo and Tigray provinces. The famine gave a final blow to the authority of the regime, not so much because it occurred—which was attributable to a natural drought—but because the government attempted to hide it, thereby showing an outrageous insensitivity that harmed its legitimacy, especially in the eyes of ordinary soldiers.

The economic crisis fully manifested the breakdown of authority. When high oil prices hit the economy, instead of endorsing the government's explanation according to which external disruptions over which it had no control caused the crisis, people put the blame directly on the regime. If the crisis had occurred ten years before, most people would have given credence to the government's story. The disbelief was a clear sign of the collapse of consensus.

Granted the centrality of the issue of legitimacy, does it mean that the value/system theory fully explains the Ethiopian Revolution? The answer is no: the loss of legitimacy explains many things save the radical direction of the change. Where reforms of the political system were enough to reinstate equilibrium, the change took the highly disruptive direction of socialism. Two basic tenets of the value/system theory pose problems here: (1) the definition of revolution as resynchronization; and (2) the origin of alternative ideologies. Johnson is right on two points: social protest is not yet revolution and intransigent elites invite revolution by refusing to reform the system. However, that reform is the normal; evolutionary way of resynchronizing a social system conflicts with the appearance of radical ideologies of social change.

A radical revolution does not resynchronize the system; it puts it upside down, breaks its continuity and attempts to recreate a completely different order. What differentiates revolution from reform—which is indeed resynchronization—is the involvement of radical changes inspired by a utopian ideology. Dysfunction points to the need to repair the system and to restore its functionality by correcting the anomaly. Such is not the case with social revolutions: these do not simply want to fix an anomaly, but rather they launch the society in pursuit of a utopian goal, which, be it noted, brings about further dislocations. The profound disruption caused by radical revolutions and the intervention of utopia hardly fit into the logic of system theory with its longing for stability and equilibrium.

If the aim of radical ideologies is not simply to repair the impaired system, how is one to explain their emergence? Johnson cannot account for the emergence of radical ideas so long as he thinks that the mission of the alternative ideology is to resynchronize the system. We cannot deduce radicalism from dysfunction, given that its ideological inspiration longs for the destruction of the

system and its replacement by an ideal society. In other words, there is more in the ideological inspiration than what is required to fix the system. It seems that the intervention of radical ideas forces us to appeal to the Marxist idea of class struggle and the subsequent decisive role of the working masses. Only the direct involvement of the masses can account for the radicalization of protests, obvious as it is that the interests of the masses demand an ideology pursuing profound structural changes. So let us see whether the Marxist understanding of class struggle better explains the intervention of utopia, all the more so as the leaders of the social protest in Ethiopia openly proclaimed their allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Marxist Theory of Revolution

The inability of value/system theories to account for the emergence of radical ideologies invites the centrality of class struggle because projects of social transformation go beyond reforms when they implicate the interests of the working masses. The Marxist emphasis on popular demands underlines that revolutions are mass movements intent on bringing about a fundamental alteration of the social order. Some such alteration is unthinkable without the inflammatory atmosphere of a radical ideology.

In order to give full vent to the Marxist understanding of revolution, it is essential that we first sketch out the general framework of the Marxist conception of social change. What singles out Marxism is neither the involvement of the masses nor the violent nature of revolution—we saw that other theories have stressed both aspects—but their insertion into the theory of class struggle conceived of as the motive force of history. Because other theories of revolution downplay the role of class struggle, the rebellion of the masses against the ruling class and the state cannot be the driving force of history and social change. Nor is revolution ultimately empowering the representatives of the masses. For these theories, too, the masses certainly want to see their demands satisfied, but they are not out to seize power and abolish classes altogether. Their impact is always confined to helping the elite group more inclined to accept their demands defeat the group that appears less willing.

According to Karl Marx, the masses are not reduced to a supportive role. The conflict between exploiters and exploited actually reveals the driving force of history, the inner momentum proving that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”³³ The struggle of slaves against slave owners, of serfs against feudal lords, or of workers against capitalists embodied the inner dynamics that brought society to the advanced stage of industrial production. The struggle of workers against capitalists is the highest and last form of class antagonism: it will lead to the seizure of power by the workers, who will then abolish all classes and the state so as to establish a communist society. The conception of class struggle as the motive force of history entails a theory of revolution that sets Marxism apart from all other theories.

In non-Marxist theories, revolutions are the products of an uneven or skewed modernization. Their approach views revolution as an abnormal phenomenon stemming from a modernization process hampered by the deficiency of important components. Where modernization is even and extensive, the conditions of revolution are nonexistent. In such societies, evolutionary progress through timely reforms avoids the intensification of tensions, and hence, the gathering of polarizing conflicts. Non-Marxist theories fully adhere to the evolutionary, step-by-step progress of historical development. However, when an abnormal condition is created (e.g., the institution of autocratic regimes or absolutism), the normal evolutionary process is hampered. Necessary reforms are then either blocked or miscarried. As a result, an abnormal tension builds, and conflicts become increasingly polarized. Revolution then becomes a momentous, violent attempt to put the society on the right path by removing the lag that is causing its dysfunction. In a word, non-Marxist "explanations usually hinge on some sort of 'lag' or lack of fit between different components of society, which are 'modernizing' at different rates."³⁴

The Marxist explanation too makes usage of the notion of lag, since crises occur when the existing society exhausts its potential for further growth as a result of one component part of the mode of production, namely, the relations of production, entering into conflict with the other part, that is, the productive forces. When this happens, "from forms of development of the forces of production these [production] relations turn into their fetters," plunging the society into a period of revolutionary crisis.³⁵ Clearly, just as with non-Marxist theories, revolution is caused by a characteristic lag and aims at removing the blockage to further advancement. The important originality of Marxism, however, is that the removal is "seen as the result of class struggle" and is conceived of as a transition "from one economic mode of production to another."³⁶ This conception regards revolution as a normal process of growth, as the process of delivery of the new through the violent dethronement of the old.

Whereas for non-Marxist theories revolution is an outcome of an abnormal situation caused by the survival of imperial or autocratic institutions, for Marxism it is a necessary law of social evolution, the inevitable emergence of a new economic system through the negation of the old society. As such, revolution is not particular to one type of society that happened to be blocked; it is the inevitable outcome of the conflict between progressive and reactionary forces. It is how the old elite is dispossessed of its control over the means of production and the state and new and higher relations are put in place of the obsolete order. For Marx, then, evolution or reform cannot remove the lag: it requires a violent showdown that destroys the old and imposes the new social order.

To the question of why social change is realized through revolution rather than through a step-by-step process, the answer is that those who control power and wealth are not likely to step aside, and so will use all means to defend their status and interests. The Marxist view "holds that the mode of production . . . develops progressively over time, while political relations are more conservative; those who hold power are unlikely to give it up just because new classes

have developed a claim to it."³⁷ To the extent that the development of nascent classes and new social relations requires the violent dethronement of the old elite, social change cannot cause the demise of a mode of production unless it takes the form of a massive revolutionary upheaval.

The process of history as one mode of production replacing an outdated one reaches the stage where the rank of torchbearer of further advancement passes to the working class. Indeed, the tremendous productive capacity of modern industry has made obsolete change in the form of one exploiting class replacing an outdated exploiting class. Thanks to industrialization and technological progress, the time of complete emancipation of working people, that is, the time of radical revolution has come. As the ideology of the working class, socialism seeks the abolition of classes, and so reflects the new relations embodied in the industrial stage of social production. Marx and Friedrich Engels underline the radicalizing content of modern times thus:

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.³⁸

For critics, the greatest challenge to Marxism has been the historical reality itself. According to the theory, all transitions from one socioeconomic formation to another must go through a revolutionary process. In actuality, many countries have made the transition to modernity in a progressive fashion. Revolution has been necessary only in countries where an abnormal situation was created as a result of major blockages. Revolution has been thus proven the exception and not the rule. In those countries where capitalism has flourished, despite the numerical growth of the working class and the high level of its political consciousness, revolution became even more unlikely. In short, the rarity of revolution invalidated the basic assumption of Marxism. To crown it all, through a paradoxical reversal of Marx's historical predictions, countries placed in the periphery of capitalism claimed to carry out socialist revolutions, thereby challenging the idea of socialism as a product of advanced capitalism.

What these reversals seem to question is the centrality of the concept of class struggle. Indeed, Marx's prediction that "the structural contradictions of capitalism would result in the most highly polarized class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat" did not come true, since the evolution of capitalism resulted in the reduction of class confrontation, and not in its intensification, as expected.³⁹ Likewise, the fact that socialist revolutions migrated to backward countries, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, etc., where the working class and capitalism are in an embryonic state, in addition to playing down the role of the working class, points to the utopian and elitist inspiration of revolutionary movements in Third World countries. Since a social goal not reflective of the

material possibilities is projected, this disparity between the ideal vision and reality attests to the utopian reading of Marxist theory, perhaps even to the utopian inspiration of Marxism itself. As dissident elites are more likely to be enamored with such an uncommon goal than ordinary working people, we suspect that they are the real players of the socialist ventures in underdeveloped countries.

This conclusion would have been quite evident were it not for the great influence of Lenin, who took upon himself the hard job of explaining why Marxism had to migrate from the center to the periphery of capitalism. Since the original concepts of Marxism categorically rule out the possibility of a socialist revolution in a Third World country like Ethiopia, the attempt to make Marxism relevant to the understanding of the Ethiopian Revolution wholly depends on Leninist interpretations and adjustments. Let us see whether Leninism better explains the radicalization of social protests in Ethiopia.

The Marxist-Leninist Theory of Revolution

The theory of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism provides the key explanation for the deferment of socialist revolution in the capitalist countries and its transference to peripheral societies. According to Lenin, by conquering the world and instituting the world-wide system of colonial domination and exploitation, the capitalist class has been able to prolong the lifespan of the system. Thanks to the huge surplus extorted from colonized countries, wages and conditions of work were improved, and this significantly curtailed the intensity of class conflict in capitalist countries. These improvements diverted the working class of core capitalist countries from the historic mission of conquering power and focused its attention on purely economic struggle. To quote Lenin,

Imperialism, which means the partition of the world, and the exploitation of other countries besides China, which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, creates the economic possibility of corrupting the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives form to, and strengthens opportunism.⁴⁰

Class struggle did not simply vanish as a result of improved conditions of existence. It moved from the center to the periphery of capitalism: colonized and dominated peoples raised the banner of national liberation and began an all-out battle against imperialism. A remarkable feature of this struggle was the reluctance of native bourgeois classes or traditional elites to assume the leadership of liberation movements. Not only were they economically too weak to challenge imperialism, but also their class interests persuaded them into allying with the imperialist bourgeoisie. The terms of the alliance allowed the peripheral bourgeoisie to extract dividends by offering cheap raw materials and labor to the manufacturing needs of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. In thus turning into comprador bourgeoisie, "capitalist classes in the Third World have proven unwilling or unable to play their 'historic role' of leading antifeudal, democratic revolu-

tions in the manner of their European counterparts."⁴¹ The absence of a genuine capitalist class having blocked the social system, the capitalist way of development had become anything but viable. No other choice was left than to bypass capitalism by directly going over to the next stage, namely, socialism. With the obstruction of the normal path of capitalist development, imperialism became "the eve of the proletarian social revolution."⁴²

The resolution to directly jump from a traditional society to socialism poses a formidable challenge stemming from the lack of appropriate material and cultural conditions. Here Lenin innovates by offering a bold proposal, to wit, "his doctrine of an avantguard control over [workers'] movement by a select, highly disciplined, and 'theoretical' cadre of professional revolutionaries."⁴³ If intellectuals versed in the Marxist science of social development turn into professional revolutionaries, they can rapidly supply the missing conditions. By organizing themselves into a vanguard party and assuming the leadership of the social movement, they can provide the necessary know-how and ideological guidance.

Intellectuals organized into a vanguard party are not necessary in the case of a developing country only. For Lenin, the abandonment of socialism in capitalist countries clearly demonstrates the need for professional revolutionaries, who alone can disengage the workers from the path of economism and reformism. The history of social struggles has confirmed beyond doubt that "the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness."⁴⁴ Revolutionary consciousness must be brought from without, that is, from professional revolutionaries whose role is both to educate the working class and lead its struggle to the revolutionary goal of the seizure of state power.

Leninist Quandaries

Lenin's analysis of the conditions of peripheral societies seems to illuminate the reason why the ideology of socialism attracted lagging societies like Ethiopia. And there is no doubt that the Leninist idea of professional revolutionaries has produced some successful outcomes in such countries as Russia, China, and Cuba. Nevertheless, it is equally true that the Leninist reinterpretation of Marxism raises many serious questions. To begin with, Marxism can no better explain the rarity of revolutions than Leninism can. Though many professional revolutionaries formed parties in Third World countries and even organized into noticeable guerrilla groups, only very few have succeeded in overthrowing the regimes against which they fought. In Latin America, for instance, the numerous attempts to repeat the Cuban Revolution have lamentably failed. Nor did increased imperialist peripherization provoke large social movements rejecting the capitalist path in favor of socialism. Instead, Leninism increasingly stirred up interrogations about the exact role of the working class: "by so heavily stressing the leadership of elements outside the purportedly revolutionary class Lenin raised the issue of how far the revolutionary movement is really the movement of the proletariat."⁴⁵

If the revolutionary ideology comes from outside, everything appears as though an alien elite falsely speaking in the name of the proletariat is appropriating the movement of the working class. The Polish anarchist, Wacław Machajski, wrote: "socialism, for all its talk about the proletariat, was the ideology of the rising middle-class intelligentsia (intellectuals, managers, professional and white-collar workers)."⁴⁶ Socialism would thus be nothing more than an ideology by which workers are duped into supporting the interests of intellectuals and bureaucrats. The economic practices of socialism (nationalization and central planning for example) privilege bureaucrats and office-holders at the expense of private entrepreneurs. In Ethiopia, socialism empowered not the workers, but young officers and bureaucrats and the intellectuals associated with them.

Philosophically, the role assigned to professional revolutionaries puts the materialist foundation of Marxism under great strain. To say that socialist revolutions occur in undeveloped countries rather than in those countries where the necessary conditions are gathered is to imply that, more than objective conditions, the force of ideas causes revolutions. The statement that revolutionary consciousness must be injected into the working class from outside seems to go against Marx's fundamental philosophical premise according to which "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."⁴⁷ The Leninist attempt to supplement the insufficiency of objective conditions with the power of ideological commitment thus appears as an idealist disfigurement of Marxism. Where material conditions are deficient, ideology becomes the primary mover. In effect, this primacy means an extreme form of voluntarism, the very one embodied in a vanguard party composed of zealous, disciplined, and hierarchically organized professional revolutionaries and exercising absolute power. As one author writes:

Marx's lifelong fulminations against all forms of idealism . . . in essence constituted an attack on voluntarism in the name of material determinism in general and the doctrine of historical materialism in particular. Lenin . . . reintroduced voluntarism into post-Marxian socialist theory.⁴⁸

The Ethiopian Revolution adds further challenges to Leninism. From one perspective, the Ethiopian case vindicates Lenin's view on the decisive role of radical intellectuals. The 1974 social protest would not have gone beyond trade-union demands were it not for the intervention of radical intellectuals and students, who not only politicized the movement but also geared it toward the socialist path. But here is the snag: intellectuals and students influenced the movement without being organized into a vanguard party. The Revolution occurred without the leadership of a radical party so that a major component of Leninism was missing. When Marxist-Leninist parties finally emerged, the Revolution was in full march as the major revolutionary measures were already taken. An even greater difficulty was that the measures were taken not by professional revolutionaries, but by young officers, NCOs, and privates who happened to be members of an impromptu military committee, namely, the Derg. Most

members of this committee had no prior political activism, still less a previous commitment to socialism. Their conversion to Marxism-Leninism is the great mystery of the Ethiopian Revolution.

As discussed in the "Introduction," many studies of the Ethiopian Revolution cast doubt on the Derg's sincere commitment to socialism. They see the conversion as a façade to legitimize the seizure of political power by the adoption of an ideology that students had popularized. Their position adds ammunition to the critics who maintain that Leninism is not the ideology of the working class. But it also raises the issue of knowing whether the Marxist-Leninist definition of the state as the defender of the economically dominant class is tenable. The definition implies that, as an instrument of class rule, the state has no autonomy *vis-à-vis* the ruling class. True, Marx and Engels and other Marxist thinkers have warned against a reductionist interpretation, arguing that the state can show autonomous reactions in many instances. Even so, they have maintained that the autonomy can never go beyond the basic interests of the ruling class so that the right term to use is "relative independence."⁴⁹

The Ethiopian situation cannot accommodate the alleged basic dependence of the state. Nothing is more arduous than to answer the question of knowing which class the Derg, as a state power, represented. Many authors reject the socialist credentials of the Derg because they feel that they cannot honestly ascribe to its policy the major objective of empowering the working people. Neither can they assign to the Derg the intent of promoting the interest of an upper or even middle class, since the revolutionary measures blocked the development of such classes. The Ethiopian Revolution calls for an approach that endows the state with more than just a relative autonomy; it even flirts with the idea of a hegemonic control of the state for the purpose of empowering an unconventional elite rather than representing the interests of a productive economic class.

Both the issue of autonomy and the rarity of revolutions place the state at the center of the problematic of revolution. We should now turn our attention to the school of thought that emphasizes both the autonomy of state and the infrequency of revolution. I have in mind the state-centered approach, the main thinker of which is undoubtedly Skocpol.

State-Centered Approach to Revolution

We have already established that neither an increased state of frustration of the masses nor the existence of widely supported ideological movements is by itself enough to cause revolution. For the latter to occur a decisive factor must be added, namely, conditions resulting in the weakening of the state. We give a good idea of Skocpol's original position if we say:

The international relations of states, and particularly the weakening of some states by war, were of great importance in revolutions. Most influentially, Skocpol also argues that states had significant autonomy from classes and other

social forces and that ideology was less important in revolutions than has usually been said.⁵⁰

The core of Skocpol's thinking flows from one fundamental question: Why are revolutions rare, even in those countries where discontents run high? So presented, the question of revolution shifts from popular discontents to the reasons why some states are unable to repress social uprisings. Consequently, whatever weakens the state (international competition, war, financial crises, internal division, etc.) becomes the prime target of investigation. Especially, military defeat has been a major cause of state breakdown, as vindicated by the cases of Russia and China. A defeated army is understandably little inclined to rescue a regime that comes under assault from the populace.

This focus on the state dilutes the view making ideology into the driving force of revolutions: the key factor is not what inspires people to rebel, but what prevented (prevents) the state from crushing the rebellion. Skocpol calls her perspective "structural" to emphasize the extent to which the occurrence of revolution depends, not on the feeling of the people, still less on the will of revolutionaries, but on structural conditions causing the breakdown of the state. Against the decisive importance given to frustration and revolutionary ideology, Skocpol opposes three basic arguments. First, facts do not confirm the assumption that no regime can survive unless it meets the demands of the masses: even largely hated regimes survive so long as they can suppress. Second, ideological movements are useful during the phase of the consolidation of revolutionary regimes, less so during the phase of upheaval. Not only are revolutionary ideologies unable to incite upheavals, but also "the rebellious masses have quite often acted on their own, without being directly organized or ideologically inspired by avowedly revolutionary leaders and goals."⁵¹ The spontaneity of the masses attests to the fact that revolutions are not made; they just happen. Third, no revolution has ever realized what its inspiring ideology promised to do. On the contrary, what is most striking about revolutions is that they invariably give rise to "outcomes neither fully foreseen nor intended by—nor perfectly serving the interests of—any of the particular groups involved."⁵² Bolshevism gave birth, not to the ideals of Marxism, but to Stalinism. In France, the defense of the new freedom led to the reign of terror and the rise of Napoleon. In China, Marxism appeared under the guise of Maoism, which hardly mirrored the ideals of a proletarian revolution.

The focus on the state does not mean that Skocpol ignores the role of classes in revolutions. In fact, she openly pays tribute to Marx for having involved classes and their struggle in the study of revolution and even admits that her own structural perspective "draws heavily upon Marxist emphases on social-structural change and class conflict."⁵³ However, had class struggle been enough to cause revolution, the latter would not have been rare, given that class conflicts pervade all social formations. In reality, class struggle only establishes the general, abstract condition of revolution; it does not tell when and where the potential for revolution becomes real. In other words, it does not theorize about the

concrete situations that produce the real and necessary conditions of revolution. As Skocpol says:

It is one thing to identify underlying, potential tensions rooted in objective class relations understood in a Marxist manner. It is another thing to understand how and when class members find themselves able to struggle effectively for their interests. When and how can subordinate classes fight successfully against those who exploit them?⁵⁴

The reason why Marxism did not underline the importance of the breakdown of the state is to be found in the belief that the state is simply an instrument of the exploiting class. The view common to both liberal and Marxist theories according to which the state is "nothing but an arena in which conflicts over basic social and economic interests are fought out" prevents the conception of the state as an independent variable.⁵⁵ The failure to endow the state with its own objectives and dynamics led Marx to overlook the specific conditions that particularly affect the state, just as it pushed him into the wrong belief that the intensification of class struggle and the ensuing weakening of the state essentially decide the occurrence of revolution. Also, by directly tying the fate of the state with the defense of the economic interests of the ruling elite, the Marxist conception did not make room for the possibility of a divergence of interest between the ruling class and those controlling the state.

A concrete understanding of revolutions begins with the admission that

states are neither mere instruments of dominant class forces nor structures simply shaped by objective economic constraints. Rather, states are fundamentally administrative and military organizations that extract resources from society and deploy them to maintain order at home and to compete against other states abroad.⁵⁶

The fact that a state extracts resources from society to implement order and compete successfully with other states can trigger a situation of competition with the economically dominant class for the control of resources. The competition can even develop into a real conflict, leading to internal divisions and the alienation of the exploiting class from the state. A case in point is the French Revolution: the fall of royal absolutism is not intelligible without the contradictions that had developed between the state and the nobility. Situations of conflict can also arise each time the state forces the exploiting class to make concessions to popular demands for the purpose of maintaining social order and peace. International competition and military pressures, too, can compel the state to adopt policies that negatively affect the interests of the dominant class. Thus, the initiation of a military venture resulting in the drainage of resources can antagonize the dominant class.

If the essential condition of revolution is the weakening of the state, then besides enumerating the internal and external causes that weaken the state, there

is the more general issue of knowing which type of state is most vulnerable to breakdown. Obviously, the impact of international competition and military pressures are likely to be most disruptive on backward or agrarian societies. So that, "revolutions occur in relatively backward states faced with a crisis engendered by military or economic competition with stronger states in the context of unevenly developed international economic and political systems."⁵⁷ The economic and military pressure of advanced countries on agrarian societies correctly describes the situation of Russia and China prior to their respective revolution. It also portrays the case of pre-revolutionary France trying to cope with England's economic and military challenges. These external pressures have caused a rift between the state and the landed aristocracy in the three countries, as monarchs pushed for modernization that conflicted with the privileges of the landed class.

The vulnerability of agrarian societies to revolution establishes the crucial role of peasants. Contradicting Marx's view, history has shown that the main social force behind revolutions is the peasantry rather than the proletariat. Instead of occurring in capitalist societies where class stratification is most developed, as a rule "from the French Revolution on, they [revolutions] have occurred in predominantly agrarian countries where capitalist relations of production were only barely or moderately developed."⁵⁸ The important role of peasants significantly orients the inquiry into the causes of revolution more toward the conflict between peasants and landlords than toward the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In addition to connecting revolutions with the process of transition to modernity, the vulnerability underlines the disruptive impact of advanced countries on transitional societies.

Skocpol and the Neglect of Ideology

While recognizing the power of Skocpol's analysis and theoretical framework, most critics do not agree with her attempt to discount the role of ideology and human will. They wonder how an upheaval of such magnitude as a social revolution could be explained without the purposive goals of the participants. Granted the importance of structural conditions and the breakdown of the state, the question remains whether these conditions and the ensuing uprising of the masses are enough to explain the venture into a revolutionary course.

Take the case of China. The attempt to explain China's revolutionary course without the purposeful leadership of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist party is not very convincing. The peasant uprisings and the weakening of the state would not have led, whatever their magnitude, to the type of revolution that occurred in China if an organized group pursuing a specific goal had not assumed the leadership of the protest. As Michael S. Kimmel puts it, "the self-conscious activity of an organized revolutionary group was crucial—a fact which Skocpol discusses but the implications of which for her structural perspective she ignores."⁵⁹ An even better example is Russia: without denying that structural factors were instrumental in causing the social uprising of 1917, Rus-

sia's future would have been totally different if the Mensheviks had defeated the Bolsheviks rather than vice versa. And what about cases such as Cuba, when the protracted guerrilla warfare of radical groups first weakened and then defeated the state? In such cases, the intention to overthrow the regime and establish a new social order clearly precedes the revolution. The latter did not just happen; it was made.

In his review of Skocpol's theory, William H. Sewell significantly strengthens the argument against the neglect of the role of revolutionary ideologies. Though Skocpol assigned to revolutions various causes and treated the state, the international situation, and class struggle as structural variables, she failed to apply the same treatment to ideology. In her eyes, ideology is a purely subjective phenomenon devoid of autonomous conditioning power. In Sewell's own words,

My quarrel with her is that she has not made her causation multiple enough—that she has not recognized the autonomous power of ideology in the revolutionary process. In her account, ideology remains conflated with class struggle or state consolidation, just as the state has usually been conflated with class in Marxist theories of revolution.⁶⁰

Sewell takes the example of the French Revolution and shows that many of its measures and decisions are not intelligible without reference to the ideological instance. These measures emanated more from the requirement of ideological consistency than from the pressure of structural conditions, all the more so as some of them unnecessarily antagonized the common people and some influential groups. Sewell cites such examples as the replacement of the old Christian calendar by a new calendar based on the events of the Revolution; the transformation of birth, marriage, and death into civic rather than religious events; and the imposition of civic oath on the clergy. Sewell characterizes this last measure as "one of the greatest political disasters of the Revolution," since it alienated both the clergy and the rural population.⁶¹

Even in terms of fundamental policy, the impact of ideology has been crucial. One of the basic differences between the French and Russian Revolutions was the abolishing of private property in Russia and its consolidation in France. Sewell asks, "Can this difference be explained without taking into account the different ideological programs of the actors in the French and the Russian Revolutions?"⁶² The leaders of the French Revolution were not opposed to private property, unlike the Bolsheviks, who declared private property anathema for reason of consistency with their Marxist commitment.

The demonstration effect of revolution is too obvious for the proposition "revolutions are not made" to be defensible. Even if it is true that the French Revolution was not a planned event, it has nevertheless directly influenced revolutionary activities in other countries. These activities harbored the deliberate, planned goal of overthrowing unpopular regimes while the latter devised new means to counter revolutions. Skocpol is right when she insists on the impact of

the international context, but she is wrong to reduce it to economic or military pressures, given that "the idea of revolution as a planned event has transformed politics—not only in France, but in the entire world."⁶³ The occurrence of revolution in one country emulates other countries and therefore directly impacts their politics. Especially, the success of a revolution has a great inspirational force on other countries, as cogently shown by the rise of Marxism-Leninism to ideological hegemony worldwide following the first successes of the Soviet Revolution. The spreading of revolutionary fervor demonstrates that ideologies travel independently of the objective conditions that generated them. They diffuse by means of education, indoctrination, and propaganda and are all the more welcomed the more they have the ability to awaken utopian longings.

For many critics, the eruption of the Iranian Revolution has been a major blow to Skocpol's thesis. It challenged two of her basic assumptions, to wit, revolution occurs only when the state is weakened and ideology does not play a major role. Neither war nor financial crisis weakened the shah: his repressive apparatus was intact and under his full control. Contrary to Skocpol's stipulation, "the Iranian Revolution occurred in a state that was powerful and wealthy and had experienced no major financial or international crises."⁶⁴ Moreover, the ideological component of the movement that brought about the overthrow of the shah was critical. No other way exists to explain the collapse of the shah than to appeal to the crucial role that the Islamic clergy and its Shiite ideology played. What undermined and defeated the impressive repressive power of the shah's regime was the mass-based movement led by the clergy and galvanized by the ideology of Islamic state and revivalism. The repeated determination of the masses to accept the ultimate sacrifice wore out the repressive will of the shah's army and police. Only a political ideology drawing on the deep religious fervor of the masses could induce this kind of martyrdom. The conclusion springs to mind: "The Iranian Revolution brings to the center of the problem the factor of ideology, a variable ignored in structural theories of revolution."⁶⁵

The additional challenge posed by the Iranian Revolution has to do with Skocpol's assumption that peasant revolts are essential to the emergence of a radical movement of transformation. The Iranian Revolution demonstrates that a predominantly urban movement can also become radical, there being no doubt that "the vital forces of the revolution—the leading clergy, the bazaaris, the urban poor, students, the nationalist opposition, the workers—were rooted in the cities."⁶⁶

I hasten to add that the Ethiopian Revolution poses challenges that are very similar to those posed by Iran. Thus, as concerns the Ethiopian state, no analysis can find anything resembling a situation of breakdown. The repressive apparatus of the state was intact, and no war threatened the country. True, there were military pressures coming from the neighboring country of Somalia and the Eritrean guerrilla movement, but none of these threats were extensive enough to defy the imperial army. The government's financial crisis was a more serious matter but not one reaching the level of bankruptcy. As already argued, rather than structural causes, what best explains Haile Selassie's downfall is the erosion of legit-

imacy: the army and the police failed to come to the rescue of the regime, owing to growing disenchantment and less so to governmental breakdown. The other resemblance with the Iranian case is the overwhelmingly urban character of the Ethiopian Revolution. Though Ethiopia was an agrarian country in dire need of a land reform, peasant uprisings were not the triggering factor of the protest. Instead, urban demonstrations caused by economic downturns created the revolutionary situation that brought about the collapse of the imperial regime. Thus, the Ethiopian Revolution flatly contradicts the statement that social revolutions cannot occur without peasant revolts.

As to the ideological issue, the application of Skocpol's theory to the Ethiopian Revolution would minimize the role of students and intellectuals, thereby missing the crucial momentum that transformed economic demands into the political demand of regime change, itself soon overtaken by the pressure for a socialist revolution. Just as the Iranian Revolution is unthinkable without the Islamist ideology and the leadership of the clergy, so too is the Ethiopian Revolution inconceivable without the activism of students and intellectuals and their commitment to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. In particular, the radical atmosphere created by students and intellectuals can alone explain the emergence and radicalization of the Derg.

We can go further by adding that the Ethiopian Revolution presents a tougher challenge to Skocpol than the Iranian case. In an attempt to show that the Iranian Revolution does not disagree with her structural approach, Skocpol argues that the Shiite ideology owed its effectiveness to the particularity of the Iranian society, which historically had developed a culture of resistance and a large network of communication and mobilization controlled by the clergy. So, "even when a revolution is to a significant degree 'made,' that is because a culture conducive to challenges to authority, as well as politically relevant networks of popular communication, are already historically woven into the fabric of social life."⁶⁷ In the Ethiopian case as well, ideology played a crucial role, but neither a preexisting culture of resistance nor the availability of a network of communication backed its impact. Worse yet, during the first uprisings and the crucial phases of the Revolution, no organized movement or party oversaw its propagation. The social protest was articulated through the concepts of a radical ideology that was more diffused than centrally controlled.

There is yet another challenge: the twists and turns of the Ethiopian Revolution are little intelligible without the emphasis on the role of individuals, notably, on the impact of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who emerged as the indisputable winner from the multiple conflicts that broke out since the beginning of protests. To say that the course of the Revolution would have been different without Mengistu's leadership is to imply that structural factors are not enough to explain it and that contingent factors, such as individual idiosyncrasies, had appreciable contributions in the gestation of events. The Ethiopian Revolution was all the more open to the impacts of contingencies because the main phases of its radicalization occurred without the supervision of an established revolutionary

party. These facts further defy the attempt to explain the Revolution in strictly structural terms.

Revolution and Elite Competition

The criticisms of Skocpol's neglect of ideology underline the crucial importance of contending elites. While it is true to say that revolutions involve the masses, it is also undeniable that only when radical elites lead the masses do their protests turn into a revolutionary movement. Even when theories of revolution acknowledge the importance of ideological leadership of elites, they have perceived revolution as a derivation of social discontent or dysfunction and not as the work of elites contending for political power. What particularizes political-conflict theories is the belief that "conflict among governments and various organized groups contending for power must be placed at the center of attention to explain collective violence and revolutions."⁶⁸ Charles Tilly is a prominent thinker of this school.

The decisive importance given to the discontent of the masses is a theme common to theories of revolution. For Tilly, however, revolutions occur, people become willing to use violence to overthrow a regime when organized contenders emerge and assume the leadership of social protests. The major weakness of the frustration theory is the neglect of "the struggles among classes and power blocks, which constitute the bulk of political conflict."⁶⁹ Discontent by itself does not trigger revolution; it does so only when a challenging elite emerges with an alternative program that obtains the support of the masses. Without the emergence of contenders we would have protests—perhaps even revolts—but never revolutions. In other words, a social protest changes into a revolutionary movement only when it couples with the conflict of elites vying for power.

We already saw that the frustration theory recognizes the role of ideology and elite leadership and even speaks of the politicization of discontent as a necessary condition of revolution. Nonetheless, it gives primacy to the discontent of the masses, and so forgets that "an important portion of collective violence pits contenders for power against one another, rather than rebels against regimes."⁷⁰ Only when the discontent is placed in the context of elites struggling for power do we understand the evolution from discontent to revolution. Accordingly, Tilly's argument

denies that accumulated rage, exhilaration, or resentment causes revolutions. It leads instead to a conception of revolution as an extreme condition of the normal political process. The distinguishing characteristic of a revolutionary situation, as Leon Trotsky said long ago, is the presence of more than one bloc effectively exercising control over a significant part of the state apparatus.⁷¹

As to the value/system approach, its major weakness is that the emphasis on stability and harmony precludes the eruption of competing groups. Johnson "essentially equates state and society. The equation shows up most clearly in the identification of the societal elite with those who run the state," says Tilly.⁷² Yet

the periodic emergence of contending groups is an undeniable feature of social organization. These groups do not necessarily come from marginalized or excluded people, either. Tilly finds "no reliable evidence of a general tendency for revolutionaries, protestors, rioters, or participants in mass movements to come disproportionately from the marginal, criminal, and/or disorganized parts of the population."⁷³ Many studies actually suggest that revolutionaries, who often come from well-to-do families, decide to grab power when they develop some conflict of interest with the ruling group. For Johnson, competing elites emerge once the existing ruling elite has lost its legitimacy as a result of dysfunction. Tilly argues that the loss of legitimacy is itself the work and the outcome of elites already contending for power.

The identifying feature of revolution is the presence of "multiple sovereignty" stemming from "the fragmentation of an existing polity into two or more blocks, each exercising control over some part of the government."⁷⁴ Accordingly, revolution is an exasperated form of political conflict, the very one opposing elites whose conflicts over issues have become so antagonistic that they cannot be resolved within the existing political system. The causes of the conflict can be various: the conduct of war, economic modernization, changes in the value system (as the emergence of new religious beliefs) can set one group against another. The point is that

a revolution begins when a government previously under the control of a single, sovereign polity becomes the object of effective, competing, mutually exclusive claims from two or more separate polities. A revolution ends when a single polity—by no means necessarily the same one—regains control over the government.⁷⁵

This raises the question of how groups advancing exclusive claims emerge from the same polity. Tilly finds the question difficult to answer, especially as regards revolutionary groups, but of little importance as it focuses on the emergence of groups when in reality the true question is how these groups progressively acquire ascendancy. For "such contenders are almost always with us in the form of millennial cults, radical cells, or rejects from positions of power. The real question is when such contenders proliferate and/or mobilize."⁷⁶ It is in connection with the question of proliferation and ascendancy that the analyses of frustration theory can be quite helpful. Such analyses can explain the "commitment to the claims [of competing elites] by a significant segment of the subject population."⁷⁷ A sudden failure of the government to meet expectations, an unjust tax increase, a military disaster, etc., can be used by contending elites to rally the masses in favor of their exclusive claims.

Elite Conflict and Radicalization

For critics, Tilly's theory does not really escape the criticisms made against other theories of revolution. Thus, the presentation of elite competition as a driving force assigns revolutions to human intent. Contending elites have political goals that make revolutions happen. The role of human intent is all the more amplified as the emphasis on elite competition overshadows the importance of class conflicts. No longer considered as active participants, the masses become a passive multitude manipulated by the political goals of contending elites. Also, to the extent that the masses are said to support the alternative claims of contending elites because of increased discontent, the human factor of frustration reappears with a sizeable role. Lastly, the emphasis on political goals and discontent rather than on structures portrays the state as a neutral object of competition, and not "as determining by its own strength or weakness whether or not a revolutionary situation can emerge at all."⁷⁸

What can be said concerning these criticisms? For one thing, it is very hard not to see that one of the basic fallouts of elite competition is the weakening of the state. As suggested by many authors, elite competition and the appearance of multiple sovereignty undermine the state from inside. What weakens the state even more than defeat in war or financial crisis is the internal erosion caused by divisions and defections. For another, the exclusive type of elite competition cannot appear in democratic states. Imperial or autocratic regimes alone are liable to intensify elite polarization to the point of breakup. The rarity of revolutions is thus explained by the prerequisite of regimes that systematically exclude. As to the importance of ideology and human agency, it follows from the undeniable fact that the involvement of contending elites is what turns social discontent into revolution. The emphasis given to elite competition constitutes, therefore, the major strength of the theory.

All the more reason why I am bound to acknowledge the strength of Tilly's theory is that it sheds light on some important aspects of the Ethiopian Revolution. Thus, the central role given to elite competition explains the collapse of the Iranian and Ethiopian states better than any other theory. In the absence of external challenges, the appearance and proliferation of disgruntled groups alone can explain the erosion of the state from inside and its inability to use its repressive power. What is more, nothing could arouse more elite dissatisfaction than the protracted monopoly of power by Haile Selassie and his clique. The resentment against the monopoly of power by an old, outdated oligarchy accounts for the generalized disaffection of the educated elite, including the young officers in the army and police.

The leading role of the intelligentsia and students must be seen against this background of exclusion and the favorable conditions created by economic downturns. Without the popular discontent, the protests of students and intellectuals would have been isolated incidents that posed no threat to the regime. Equally true, however, is the fact that the popular discontent would not have gone beyond protests if excluded elites had not come up with alternative poli-

ties. Tilly's theory makes clear the gathering of the conditions of revolution as a result of convergence between the popular discontent and elites contending for power. Better still, it points to the reason why the Ethiopian Revolution developed a tendency toward ethnicization. The concept of elite competition accounts for the ethnic dimension and the active role that individuals and groups from disgruntled ethnics, such as Tigreans and Eritreans, played in the Revolution. Only by propagating ethnonationalist claims could these groups successfully vie for power. The positioning for competition over the control of power explains why neither the overthrow of the monarchy nor the Derg's radical attempt to end class exploitation satisfied ethnicized groups. For them, the end of class oppression did not entail the termination of the supremacy of Amhara elite.

Even though Tilly's theory illuminates many aspects of the Ethiopian Revolution, its full applicability requires some rethinking of its presuppositions and concepts. Thus, unlike Tilly, who admits that the appearance of a group committed to the fundamental transformation of society "remains one of the mysteries of our time," it is essential that we bring to light the conditions under which elites develop or adhere to radical ideologies.⁷⁹ Why did the Ethiopian educated elite opt for the radical ideology of socialism when it could have used liberal mottos to unseat the regime? Democratic demands, such as freedom of expression, the right to organize, the rule of law, etc., would have been enough to undermine Haile Sellasie's autocracy. Tilly's association of ideology with the conquest of power rather than with class struggle is a positive point, but it does not explain why elites produce or adhere to ideologies that advocate the empowerment of the masses (such as Marxism-Leninism) instead of supporting liberal values and institutions, which are more in line with their elite status.

One answer to the question would be to say that elites use populist ideologies to obtain the support of working people. In addition to being somewhat simplistic, some such answer does not yet say why liberalism has been rejected. With liberal values as well Ethiopian elites could have gained the support of the working people. The disparity between the political goal, that is, the conquest of power by disgruntled elites, and the ideology, which speaks in the name of the people, is indeed a serious problem. Its seriousness is such that it can even recommend the reinstatement of class struggle as the driving force of revolution. In an underdeveloped country like Ethiopia, what else could explain how and why some elite groups become spokespersons of the masses but the reality of a historical situation in which class struggle remains deadlocked? If neither the bourgeoisie nor the workers are strong enough to move the society forward, the intermediate stratum of intellectuals, students, bureaucrats, young officers, etc. can be called upon to assume the historic mission of representing the workers. As such, they conquer power but for the purpose of creating the objective and subjective conditions necessary to implement socialism.

The trouble with this explanation is none other than the hypostatization of class struggle. Elites become instruments of a process endowed with its own momentum and objectives. One way of avoiding this extreme position while not

succumbing to the crude view according to which elites concoct radical ideologies to fool the masses is to inquire whether the disparity between the political goal and the commitment to radical ideology does not derive from the very conditions of power conquest and a cultural setting favoring polarization. My contention is that the Ethiopian Revolution strongly encourages this line of inquiry, especially when one is faced with the difficult task of explaining the radicalization of the Derg.

To highlight the radicalizing role of elite competition, let me briefly contrast my position with that of Addis Hiwet in his article titled "Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution." Like Christopher Clapham (see Chapter 1), Addis maintains that, though Ethiopia has undergone one of the most radical revolutions, most scholars in the West have ignored it because they disliked the repressive nature of its military leadership.⁸⁰ In addition, he counters the argument according to which the Derg could not implement a genuine social change by the contention that the military regime is simply "the disavowed, unacknowledged political child of the left."⁸¹ For Addis, what explains the radicalization of the Ethiopian Revolution is not so much the ideological fervor of the left or the Derg as "the primacy of class struggle."⁸² The fact that the demands of the insurgent masses far exceeded what the imperial regime could offer as reforms propelled protests toward radicalization.

The primacy of class struggle explains everything except the grave drawbacks that Addis rightly denounces, namely, the undemocratic and repressive nature of the Derg, the fatal divisions within the civilian left, and the proliferation of ethnonationalist and secessionist movements, especially in Eritrea. By contrast, when the dynamics of radicalization is ascribed to elite conflicts, the drawbacks find their proper explanation. Obviously, such failings are attributable to vying elites seeking the exclusive control of power rather than to working masses, even if one assume (which is a big if) that the latter's demands exceeded the reform capacities of the imperial regime. To lay the theoretical grounds for the explanation of the radicalizing impact of elite conflicts, the next chapter will attempt to articulate the connection between power and ideology.

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Ideology and Power Struggle

In order to understand the reasons why elites vying for power adopt radical ideologies, we must begin by making the important distinction between social and political revolutions. When such a distinction is made, the nature of the political conflict that brings about the radicalization of ideology becomes intelligible. Indeed, there is no denying that revolutions differ in intensity and depth and that the more radical a revolution is, the more it points to uncommon conditions of political struggle, and the greater the impact of ideology becomes. Theories of revolution fail to properly articulate the connection between radical ideologies and power struggles when they overlook the difference in kind between social and political revolutions.

Social and Political Revolutions

Many theoreticians of revolution use the qualification "great" when they speak of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions. Such revolutions as the American or the English Revolutions are not usually included in the category of "great revolutions," mainly because the intensity and depth of their transformations are not comparable to those of the "great revolutions." Unlike the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, "the American War of Independence resulted in a change of government, but it was not accompanied by a massive social upheaval. And what some call the English Revolution, other call the English Civil War."¹ Another qualification is used to signify the same thing: whereas the American and English Revolutions are defined as "political revolutions," revolutions that resulted in deeper transformations, like the French, the Russian, and the Chinese Revolutions "are sometimes referred to as 'great' or 'social' revolutions."²

The difference between the two types of revolution is not difficult to establish concretely. As the expression indicates, a political revolution is a violent, unconstitutional overthrow of a political regime resulting in the enthronement of a new and reformist political elite. In addition to accomplishing this, a social revolution goes deeper and effects transformations in the social structure and cultural sphere. It "entails not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic, and/or cultural change during or soon after the struggle for state power."³

The difference can be expressed otherwise if we say that the purpose of political revolutions is to transform the state and the political elite so as to introduce reforms and modernize the social system. The reforms adjust the lagging political structure to the requirement of economic modernization but fall short of altering the class structure of the society. Social revolutions alter the class structure, and so are more radical. The difference between the two revolutions is not, therefore, simply one of degree or intensity. The difference in intensity is itself expressive of a difference in kind deriving from dissimilar social goals or projects. Political revolutions are corrections or synchronizations; they "occur mainly when new economic and social developments have already begun to transform society, but where existing political rulers and institutions are tending to hold back further changes."⁴ Basically, political revolutions implement reforms by removing political systems that are at odds with the advancement of modernization. A characteristic case is when a landed aristocracy preserves its political supremacy in a modernizing society. In such a case, the removal of the political elite opens the path of reforms for further modernization.

Social revolutions have a much higher social goal and go beyond the concern of reforming or correcting the social system. What they want is "to transfer economic assets and power, and social and political status and privileges, from one social group to another."⁵ They do so through the pursuit of social equality, with the consequence that the class structure of society is altered. Not only are social revolutions more deep-going and violent than political revolutions, but they also harbor the goal of transforming human existence in a redemptive fashion, thereby revealing an inspiration that can be characterized as utopian. As such, they are, to a great degree, ideologically-driven revolutions. Revolutions inspired by the Marxist ideology are the best example of this type of revolution.

The fact that social revolutions are not confined to the purpose of removing obstacles gives greater importance to the ideological inspiration. In political revolutions, the goal is to adjust the political order to the level of social transformations already in gestation. Not so with social revolutions: their concern is about realizing an ideal social order by establishing a just and equal society. Not only do they strive to remove obstacles and correct a system that has become dysfunctional because of the lag of the political system, but they also aim to institute an order that belongs to the realm of the ideal. Because their ideological inspiration does not simply denounce malfunctions, but also goes after the perfect, moral concern understandably plays a greater role.

Here, a question can be raised as to the validity of placing the French Revolution in the category of social revolution when the classical interpretation, which is also backed by the Marxist school, defines it "as a modernizing liberal-democratic revolution or as a bourgeois, capitalist revolution."⁶ Indeed, its main result was the overthrow of royal absolutism and noble privileges. Moreover, in addition to attempting to institutionalize civil liberties and electoral democracy, the French Revolution, unlike the Russian or Chinese Revolutions, did not outlaw private property in the name of human equality.

The problem with a liberal understanding of the French Revolution is that many of its realizations hardly agree with the interests and aspirations of the bourgeoisie. To begin with, the bourgeoisie never assumed the leadership of the Revolution. At the height of the Revolution, its leaders were such people as Maximilien Robespierre and Louis de Saint-Just, who were intellectuals and fervent followers of Jean Jacques Rousseau. In what sense were Rousseau's egalitarian ideas in agreement with bourgeois aspirations? And what about the Reign of Terror? Did it really promote bourgeois interests? What is more, neither the destructions caused by the revolutionary wars, nor the subsequent establishment of dictatorship agree with the pursuit of bourgeois interests. Is it convincing to characterize Napoleon Bonaparte as a representative of bourgeois interest when his pursuit of military glory brought so much havoc to commerce and industry? These anti-capitalist features of the French Revolution are significant enough to replace the traditional view with the interpretation of "France as the forerunner of Russia rather than the culmination of liberal (and 'Anglo-Saxon') revolutionary movements."⁷

Alexis de Tocqueville's study of the evolution of the French Revolution gives a clear idea of the distinction between social and political revolutions. Tocqueville wants to understand nothing less than the paradox of a revolution that started with the defense of freedom but ended with the Napoleonic dictatorship. Its beginning was indeed glorious: the French showed their commitment to both equality and freedom "when they wanted to create not only democratic institutions but free ones; when they sought not only to destroy privileges but to honor and recognize rights."⁸ What the French had in mind when they started the upheaval was thus the type of political revolution that would wipe out absolutism and noble privileges in the manner of the English Revolution. But the direction of the Revolution changed quickly when, with the victory of the radical Jacobins over the Girondins, the concern for equality overshadowed the commitment to freedom. The victory announced the sliding of the Revolution into the path of centralization and egalitarianism, with many activist circles giving more importance to social equality than to the defense of individual freedom.

Tocqueville derives the origin of egalitarian ideology from the abusive inequality and scandalous privileges of the nobility typical of the French society as well as from the centralizing tendency of absolutism. The hatred of inequality developed theoretical tendencies defining "the ideal society" as "a people without any aristocracy other than government officials, a single and all-powerful

administration, director of the state, guardian of individuals."⁹ In thus underlining the impact of egalitarian ideology, Tocqueville counters the classical interpretation by showing that the French transformation was bourgeois only in the first phase of the Revolution. It took the direction of a social revolution when leaders committed to egalitarian ideology eliminated the moderates. The highly conflictual and anarchical situation created by the pursuit of egalitarianism paved the way for the rise of Napoleon and the complete confiscation of liberty.

Because the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions were more after equality than freedom, they are properly identified as social revolutions. Political revolutions of the type achieved in England and America were strictly bourgeois revolutions in that their major objective was the institution of freedom through the democratization of the political life. Bourgeois revolutions strive for equality, but in the sense of equal rights, not in the sense of egalitarianism or the abolition of class distinctions. Revolutions advocating equality have the characteristic tendency of suppressing freedom in the name of equality. The goal of equality entails greater economic centralization and state control. You cannot establish equality through a *laissez-faire* policy; you must expropriate property and distribute wealth through forceful means while holding in check any tendency to rise above the common people. Underlining the inevitable shift of egalitarianism to dictatorship, one author writes:

The Thermidorian reaction seems to us no longer a possible danger that revolutions must avoid, but a necessary consequence of the very nature of the revolutionary ideology and the revolutionary struggle. So clear, and so apparently inevitable, is the centralizing, dictatorial trend of revolutions.¹⁰

That is why Hanna Arendt's definition of revolution is very restrictive at best. According to her definition, the exclusive goal of revolution is freedom, understood as "liberation from oppression."¹¹ The definition does not include the French Revolution and those revolutions inspired by Marxism, which gives priority to the liberation from poverty and the pursuit of egalitarian ideal. Her definition applies only to the American Revolution, which was really about conquering freedom. Instead of welcoming the idea of different types of revolution, Arendt sticks to a univocal definition of revolution and decides to treat revolutions not confirming her definition as anomalies, as deviations caused by a detrimental escapade into the social question. Thus, she accuses Karl Marx of distorting the meaning of revolution by involving the issue of poverty, thereby directing revolution toward the wrong path of "the abdication of freedom before the dictate of necessity."¹² In thus abandoning the inspiring model of the American Revolution, with freedom as its central goal, the Marxist view of "revolutions had definitely come under the sway of the French Revolution in general and under the predominance of the social question in particular."¹³

The problem with Arendt's approach is that the French and Russian Revolutions are not anomalies, but prototypes of revolutions. We will avoid understanding the greater radicalism of social revolutions in terms of deviations if we

concentrate on their nature. Unlike political revolutions, which are moderate, realistic, and more focused on providing practical solutions to social blockage, utopian inspirations propel social revolutions. Let us see how this distinction can clarify the role of ideology.

Two Phases of Revolution

Though many theoreticians concede that the more a revolution is radical, the higher the role allotted to ideological commitment becomes, the dominant understanding maintains that the overthrow of a regime can never be the exclusive work of an ideological movement. Not only are massive discontents and uprisings necessary to destroy a regime, but also, as underlined by Theda Skocpol, structural conditions must weaken the state. The sheer presence of movements of ideological opposition produces neither of these conditions.

I agree with Skocpol's position, provided it is confined to situations leading to political revolutions. The latter are dependent on structural conditions but also always precede social revolutions. My thesis maintains that the precedence of political revolutions create favorable conditions for the ascendancy of radical groups. Social revolutions are excrescences of political revolutions. They do not happen by themselves; they occur on the wings of political revolutions. The failures, confusions, uncertainties, and divisions created by political revolutions give opportunity for organized radical groups to seize power and launch the movement into a radical course. These groups initiate a social revolution, that is, a change derived from the need not so much to correct the social system as to remain consistent with ideological commitments. By definition, this kind of revolution is rare because most of the time moderates succeed in retaining power and confining the process to a reformist agenda. But depending on circumstances determined by the organizational and leadership strength of radical groups and the level of predicaments caused by the social upheaval, extremists can eliminate moderates and impart a movement pursuing utopian goals.

Scholars who dispute the idea that ideological movements can overthrow a regime are right, but wrong when they conclude that ideology is irrelevant. They forget that the structural conditions are met during the first phase, which therefore creates the conditions for a radicalized minority to seize power and lead the revolution. On the other hand, those who argue that ideology can be powerful enough to topple a regime are wrong, but they are right when they insist that structural explanations never account for the radicalization of the movement. They simply need to understand that political revolutions unintentionally lay the ground for the rise of radical groups. Structural conditions can never explain the radicalization of the movement: intention is crucial, and its success depends on the favorable conditions created during the prior phase of political revolution.

As a first phase, political revolutions are mostly accountable in terms of structural conditions, which determine both their possibility and their corrective, reformist agendas. However, reformist attempts can also generate conditions favoring radical groups, either because they are not properly done or because

they give rise to high expectations. The renewed upheavals that follow initiate the second phase of the revolution, the phase of social revolution. In this second phase, intentions are crucial since, beyond the need to fix the system, it deploys the resolution to shape society in accordance with utopian views. The ideological factor is decisive, not only because it leads to a radical policy, but also because it explains the victory of radicals. For one thing, a radical ideology with its rallying cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity" easily mobilizes the masses; for another, utopian ideologies induce a fanatical devotion that emboldens radical groups. Beyond corrective measures, the intervention of powerful emotions galvanizes both the masses and the leadership and helps them achieve victory.

The distinction between political and social revolutions, more exactly, the understanding that social revolutions find their prerequisites in the earlier phase of political revolution provides a precise solution to the problem dividing scholars of revolution. The objection according to which ideological movements are unable to cause revolutions is easily countered if it is shown that social revolutions are outgrowths of political revolutions, which are caused by structural factors. Some such periodization displays how the first phase of political revolution creates conditions that allow ideological movements to play a primary role in the phase of radicalization.

The story of the great revolutions perfectly confirms the above thesis. We have already seen how the French Revolution took a radical course as a result of radicals (the Jacobins) eliminating moderates (the Girondins). The political phase had mobilized internal enemies and conspirators, as well as foreign European monarchies, against the Revolution. In the summer of 1793, the internal opposition and the advance of foreign armies on the national territory produced a political crisis that increased the rivalry between the Girondins and the more radical Jacobins. This political and national crisis gave the Jacobins the opportunity to remove the moderates and galvanize the masses into the defense of the revolution and the nation.

The way the Russian Revolution evolved is another confirmation of the need to distinguish between political and social revolutions. The distinction was actually quite common among Soviet historians, who spoke of "two distinct revolutions, the first primarily bourgeois in character, and the latter unambiguously proletarian."¹⁴ The bourgeois phase of the Revolution comprised the events that led to the February Revolution, namely, the spontaneous and violent demonstrations on the streets of Petrograd and military mutinies over defeats encountered in the battlefields of World War I. The outcome was the removal of Tsar Nicholas II from power and the establishment of the Provisional Government. The second phase, called "the October Revolution," was the product of deliberate events orchestrated by a small group of people, the Bolsheviks, who ended up by staging a coup against the Provisional Government. The latter was mostly composed of moderates who initiated liberal reforms, such as freedom of expression, the separation of church and state, civil rights, etc. Unfortunately, the government proved unable to resolve the two major problems of land distri-

bution and Russia's involvement in the war. Further military reversals and economic deterioration created favorable conditions for Lenin and his Bolshevik party. By using simple yet powerful slogans, such as, "end the war," "all land to the peasants," and "all power to the Soviets," Lenin significantly enlarged the Bolsheviks' popular base and successfully realized his plan to seize power.

The pattern is clear enough: "initially . . . the moderates (Kerensky, Madero, Sun Yat-sen) tend to assume authority. Typically, they attempt to establish some sort of liberal, democratic, constitutional state."¹⁵ However, depending on circumstances, a second and more radical phase can follow in which moderates "are swept from power" by leftist or rightist radicals.¹⁶ In such a case, ideology assumes a greater role both in determining the process leading to the seizure of power and the direction of the movement. The second or the social phase is rare, as most countries succeed in stabilizing the political phase by adequate reforms that prevent the gathering of conditions favoring the victory of radical groups.

The Ethiopian Revolution perfectly adheres to the above pattern. Revolutionaries did not cause the social protests that forced Emperor Haile Selassie to nominate a new cabinet, which promised to make the necessary reforms. The protests were spontaneous movements instigated by the deterioration of conditions of life. The hesitations of the new cabinet and the internal divisions within the ruling class allowed radicals to emerge in the open and, thanks to the newly acquired freedom of expression, to politicize the protests. To counter the radicalization of the protests, the new prime minister called upon the armed forces to defend law and order. This invitation only ignited the political ambition of young officers, especially of those already exposed to radical ideas. Thus was created the momentum that led to social revolution through the formation of the Derg, the progressive radicalization of which entailed the elimination of moderates first from the Derg itself, and then from the armed forces and positions of authority in the civilian establishment.

Social Blockage and Political Revolution

According to the theory of relative deprivation, some kind of improvement as a result of which new expectations appear is necessary for revolution to occur, obvious as it is that only social conditions displaying "the appearance of new technologies, social groups and ideological developments . . . increasingly call into question traditional economic structures, political institutions and ways of thinking."¹⁷ No expectation can emerge in a society frozen in its traditional structures and beliefs. Improvements, however limited, create new hopes which, if unsatisfied, provoke the sense of injustice and blockage. For instance, when unemployment affects the urban population, especially young educated people, or when inflation makes life difficult, or when social mobility is closed to ambitious individuals, frustration grows and with it the sense that people are deliberately deprived of the benefits of progress.

The perception that social blockage is due to the ruling elite's rejection of necessary reforms creates the conviction that constitutional means cannot re-

move the blockage. In particular, blockage of social mobility affects educated elites, who feel excluded or marginalized by existing institutions even though they are the main agent of modernization. These excluded elites increasingly come round to the idea that their social promotion is tied up with their ability to connect with the frustration of lower classes. This alliance of interests between excluded elites and the masses can generate a revolutionary situation whenever crises affecting the ruling class incapacitate the repressive power of the state and stir up the anger of the masses. The situation reflects the conditions necessary to stage a political revolution, which simply targets the liberalization of the system through the removal of existing privileges. However, it can also evolve into a social revolution if conditions favoring radical groups emerge. Let us first ascertain the validity of the concept of social blockage as an initiator of revolution.

The Marxist theory of class struggle and, in some sense, the theory of relative deprivation underscore the pivotal role of the masses in the revolutionary process. Marx's central notion of class struggle maintains that the masses, not elites, make history, which history realizes their aspirations in a progressive and goal-oriented fashion. The problem with this approach is that the leaders and inspirators of revolutions do not often come from lower classes. Knowing the essential role of leadership, it is very difficult to argue that the demands of the masses propel revolutions. That is why theories belonging to modernization school, such as the functionalist or political conflict, have emphasized the crucial role of elite conflicts. These schools have developed views replacing class struggle with intra-class or intra-elite conflict. For them, in revolutionary transitions, "the conflicts and 'struggles' were *intra-class within* the old and emerging new ruling classes, which responded to underlying economic changes. Slave and serf revolts were at best secondary and supplementary."¹⁸

No sooner do we grant that the essential conflict and the driving force of revolutions originate from elite rivalries than we run into two fundamental difficulties. The first one is that modern revolutions deeply involve the masses. Unlike the traditional world, where change assumed a cyclical form because one dynasty was overthrowing another, modern revolutions witness the active participation of a large mass of people. To the extent that the latter expect concrete improvements in their condition of life, modern revolutionary changes are not reducible to elite rivalries. The second difficulty is that modern ideologies, such as Marxism, ostentatiously fight for the interests of the masses and advocate the dissolution of elites. Marxist revolutions have staged elites speaking in the name of the masses and calling for the end of class distinctions.

The position according to which the populist content of these ideologies is only a smokescreen for elite rivalries explains many things except the important fact that these ideologies are the very ones that trigger social revolutions. The normal mode of the enthronement of a competing elite being political revolution, the conditions under which elite rivalry steers toward social revolution remains unexplained. And if one ascribes the shift from political to social revolution to the intervention of the masses, one goes back to the Marxist notion of

class struggle as the motive force of history. However, one way of avoiding a return to Marxism is to say that social revolutions implicate special elites, that is, elites whose enthronement requires a complete socio-cultural transformation. Before discussing this solution, let us firmly establish the role of elite rivalry.

Modernization intensifies elite competition, especially in those societies where influential traditional oligarchies confront modernizing elites. One possible outcome is that the conflict produces a system excluding modernizing elites from political decisions and representations. The classical type of this exclusion takes the form of an autocratic state headed by a traditional emperor. A social system in which the old elite maintains its wealth and influence by blocking the rise of the modernizing elite is highly vulnerable to revolution. One important condition of revolution is, therefore, the blockage of social mobility or circulation of elites. The establishment of a "rigid caste system which would bar the possibility of rise to the able but low-born, any stoppage of what Pareto calls the '*circulation of the elites*,' would be a very important preliminary symptom of revolution."¹⁹

To this major conflict is often added popular discontent over economic hardship. The aspiring elite uses the discontent to pressure for change, thereby assuming the leadership of the popular protests. Strictly speaking, there is only a coincidence of interests between the working masses and the rising elite; the latter does not yet claim to be their representative. The rising elite fights for its own hegemony and interests, but it needs the support of the masses to unseat the old oligarchy. The supplementary inputs of popular protests "further destabilize an already unstable state, if only by obliging it to spend already scarce resources to defend itself."²⁰

As already indicated, only regimes of a certain type engender the conditions of revolution. Social systems that make necessary reforms and welcome new elites are not susceptible to revolutionary upheavals. By contrast, autocratic and dictatorial regimes with their embedded tendency to block social mobility and suppress protests are most vulnerable to revolution, because they offer no other choice than their violent overthrow. In other words, "ascending or aspiring groups and rigid or inflexible institutions are the stuff of which revolutions are made."²¹ It follows that revolutionary movements do not endanger democratic political systems even if they come under the pressure of increased popular discontents. This is confirmed by the fact that revolutions occurred in autocratic imperial regimes, as in France, Russia, China, and, more recently, Iran and Ethiopia. Narrowly based military dictatorships provide another variety, as in Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Cuba.

Once more, Tocqueville provides the best insight into the nature of regimes vulnerable to revolution. His investigation into the reasons why France became revolutionary while the English society opted for an evolutionary course puts the blame on the French social rigidity. In direct opposition to France where the nobility jealously preserved the caste system inherited from the Middle-Ages, England became "the only country where the caste system had not been merely changed but really destroyed. In England, nobles and commoners together en-

gaged in the same businesses, pursued the same professions, and, what is still more important, married each other."²² This opening of the English nobility to commoners was instrumental in deterring conflict between the old aristocracy and new aspiring elites. Better still, they found common cause in their fight against absolutism, the result of which was the establishment of an open and democratic society. While the British aristocracy, in addition to being involved directly in business activity, was allying with rising elites and the people to counter royal absolutism, "the French nobility of the eighteenth century was actually tightening its lines, making access to the top more difficult for ambitious non-nobles."²³ The lack of opening created the need to defend outdated privileges by the means of an absolutist state.

The defense of traditional privileges impacted on the cultural sphere as well. As a rule, those societies that have escaped radical revolutions in the West have accompanied socio-political reforms with renovations affecting the ideological component, notably by adopting Reformation ideas. Such was the case in England, Switzerland, northern European countries, and the United States. To the question of why these countries did not develop radical revolutionary movements, the complete answer is that reforms preventing exclusion and allowing ideological diversity—thanks to the headway of Protestantism—accompanied their modernization process. Where Protestantism has become influential, parliamentary traditions have flourished to the detriment of absolutism. By contrast, because the Reformation did not affect the basic ideological outlook of France and Russia, the authoritarian form of the traditional religion (Catholicism in France, Orthodox Christianity in Russia) was maintained, together with an absolutist state apparatus. Where modernization took place without allowing social mobility and ideological dissent, revolutionary doctrines have found numerous followers. As one author puts it,

The revolutionary faith developed in nineteenth-century Europe only within those societies that had not previously (1) legitimized ideological dissent by breaking with medieval forms of religious authority, and (2) modified monarchical power by accepting some form of organized political opposition.²⁴

Radical Ideology and Social Revolution

Now is the time to directly confront the reason why political revolutions sometimes drift into social revolutions. The question does not have an easy answer, given that the objectives of political revolutions do not seem to require such a denouement. With the opening up of the social system, aspiring elites as well as the masses should be equally satisfied. Why, then, do some aspiring groups come up with the type of radical ideology calling for social revolution when reforms unlock social mobility?

Marxism has no problem in answering the question. The emergence of appropriate objective and subjective conditions under advanced capitalism allows

the working class to produce its own leaders and intellectuals, who will then lead the class struggle to the final conclusion of abolishing classes. Both the working class and its representatives are interested in the eradication of classes so that the adoption of radical ideology simply reflects the stage of maturity of social conflicts. Unfortunately, reality did not concur with the Marxist scheme on two important points: (1) in countries where capitalism developed vigorously, social revolutions became increasingly unlikely; and (2) paradoxically, the Marxist ideology migrated to those countries where the peasantry is overwhelmingly present while the proletariat is nascent. Groups belonging to bourgeois or petty bourgeois classes spoke in the name of the masses and adopted ideologies calling for social revolutions. The absence of a large militant working class makes problematic the question of why aspiring elites espouse the type of radical ideology that precipitates political revolutions into social revolutions.

Many scholars resolve the question by the assumption that, under certain conditions, aspiring elites adopt radical ideas to gain the support of the masses. For modernization theorists, for instance, elite conflicts initiate a radical process of change whenever the support of the masses becomes necessary to dismantle a highly repressive or entrenched old order. This happens every time a landed nobility blocks the rise of new elites: according as the nobility is strong or not, the process of change can go in the direction of social or political revolution. If the landed nobility is strong, no other way exists for aspiring elites to bring about change than to incite and lead assaults from below by advocating radical changes. They thus readily politicize popular unrests by convincing the masses that their demands cannot be satisfied unless the social system is completely changed. As one author says,

Social revolutions tend to happen when a particular economic and social system is seen as having stagnated, or as being incapable of any further progressive development. In such situations, revolutionaries argue that only a fundamentally new type of social system will enable humanity to progress.²⁵

The French and Chinese Revolutions are typical cases of elites mobilizing the masses to remove the landed nobility. If the landed aristocracy is weak, political revolution is enough to open up the social system.

The problem with this approach is the stipulation that elites do not really believe in the radical ideologies they propagate. They use them to mobilize the masses when what they have in mind is their own empowerment. This deceptive use of ideology does not square with the fervor that is characteristic of revolutionary elites. Nor does it explain the need for social revolution when liberal political change can ensure the empowerment of such elites. Since people want to get out of an autocratic system that imposes outdated privileges and denies the basic rights of freedom of association and expression, bourgeois notions of equality and freedom are perfectly apt to unite the masses and aspiring elites. If these elites can obtain the support of the masses by upholding a liberal society, why, then, would they need the egalitarian ideology of socialism? It is not yet clear why a blocked social system necessitates radical ideas when the slightest

opening, the most benign reform is enough to bring it down. Indeed, the more the system is arrested, the less able it is to accommodate the slightest reform without crumbling totally. Scholars forget how unsettling elementary bourgeois rights are to feudal or autocratic societies. If a small dose of liberalization is enough to kill the system, then the recourse to a radical ideology of change strikes one as superfluous.

Instead of aspiring elites politicizing the masses, what if the latter impose their demands on a social system of class domination considerably weakened by the breakdown of the state? Such is Skocpol's position: noting the importance of peasant insurrections in social revolutions, she argues that radicalization is due essentially to the intervention of peasants. Whereas political revolutions are less subject to pressures from below, the defining feature of social revolutions is the massive participation of the peasantry. According to her studies, the intervention of peasants accounts for the essential difference between the French and English Revolutions. What prevented the English Revolution from turning into a social revolution is the absence of "widespread peasant revolts against landlords."²⁶ Because the Revolution was essentially the work of the nobility with little pressure from peasants, it resulted in the drastic limitation of the power of the king to the advantage of the Parliament, but it neither altered the social structure nor empowered a new elite. In the words of Skocpol,

Though the English Revolution was certainly a successful revolution, it was not a *social* revolution like the French. It was accomplished not through class struggle but through a civil war between segments of the dominant landed class (with each side drawing allies and supporters from all of the other classes and strata). And whereas the French Revolution markedly transformed class and social structures, the English Revolution did not.²⁷

In assigning the radicalization of the French Revolution to the forceful intervention of peasants, Skocpol secures the means of significantly downplaying the role of ideology. She accordingly proposes the explanation according to which the difference between social and political revolutions stems from structural rather than ideological factors. Unlike England, appeasement of peasant demands forced the French Revolution into the type of radical change that attacked the nobility. Elite conflicts do not cause social revolutions; by themselves, they cannot go beyond political revolutions, as shown by the English Revolution. Consequently, what radicalizes a movement of protest is not so much ideology as the class struggle of the masses.

Skocpol's explanation would have been decisive if a brief comparison between the French and Russian Revolutions did not tell a different story. The French Revolution eliminated the privileges of the nobility but fell short of outlawing private property, which was even declared an inviolable right. The Russian Revolution abolished private property altogether, therefore giving birth to an even more radical revolution. Can structural factors explain the disparity between the two revolutions, both radicalized by peasant interventions? Whatever

the explanation, the supposition that the abolishing of private property in Russia was a peasant demand is little defensible. Throughout history peasants have shown a stubborn commitment to private ownership of land. The desire to eliminate private property can only come from outside peasant circles, in fact, from radicalized elite groups. Imperative, therefore, is the need to appeal to the Bolshevik ideology of socialism, which openly militated against private property. What happened in Russia cannot be explained independently of the commitment of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to Marx's theoretical works. Despite their radicalism, the French revolutionaries did not harbor the goal of abolishing private property because no elaborate theoretical justification for such a measure was then available. The abolishing of private property in Russia, and not in France, has to do more with the spread of Marxist ideology than with structural factors.

We can reach a similar conclusion concerning the difference between the English and French Revolutions. The absence of revolts from below in England does not mean that peasants and workers had no grievances against the ruling class. Rather, because the change envisaged by the upper class and the ideologues of aspiring elites was confined to limiting royal power, there was no need to politicize the grievances of lower classes. By contrast, radical ideologues, who spoke of equality, freedom, and happiness for all, both inspired and led the French Revolution. Such a universal message of emancipation could not but politicize peasant discontents and steer protests into the path of social revolution. Clearly, the ideological disparity explains better than the structural differences the question of why, unlike England, France's modernization took the path of social revolution. The objective of universal liberation has neither the same opponents nor the same allies as the goal to limit royal power.

To summarize, the real reason for a revolution to be either political or social is ultimately ideological. If the message of the liberation is universally redemptive, it tends to call for a total change. If the liberation seeks the more limited goal of opening up a closed system, it is content with altering the political system. The immediate question that comes to mind is what drives some elites to espouse ideologies that seek universal redemption. The answer requires a further elaboration of the notion of competing elites. Not all aspiring elites initiate social revolutions, even if conditions seem to require them. A special kind of elites, to wit, elites that have developed idiosyncratic traits, seems necessary to trigger social revolutions. We will examine this idea in Chapter 4.

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Subjective Conditions of Social Revolutions

The project of remaking society differentiates, we said, social revolution from the type of change characteristic of political revolutions, for "without the concerted effort to remake society, an insurrection remains no more than an unconstitutional transfer of power."¹ Since in agreement with many scholars my position rejects the exclusive attribution of such a project to structural causes, I say that the utopian inspiration inherent in the project of remaking society "gives revolutions a logic and dynamic of their own, one not derivable from the necessity of social conditions or the ineluctability of social structures and processes."² Let us elaborate.

Social Revolution and Millennialism

Some authors have suggested that the explanation of social revolutions should focus on the involvement of unorthodox elites. Such elites call for a total transformation because their characteristics are so idiosyncratic that a mere reshuffling of social systems cannot accommodate their rise to political supremacy. The old systems must be put upside down and reconstructed under different principles. The more the leaders of the revolution are marginal groups, the higher, therefore, is their commitment to total change. As Misagh Parsa puts it, "whether large-scale social conflicts will end in political change only or eventually transform the entire social structure depends, at a minimum, upon the challenges that ultimately seize power."³ Thus, excluded ethnic or religious groups cannot achieve political dominance by simply reforming an old system that was designed to exclude them; they must tear the system down and rebuild it anew.

According to Jack A. Goldstone, besides the three conditions of state breakdown, severe elite divisions, and popular uprisings, the occurrence of social rev-

olution requires a fourth condition, namely, "an increase in the salience of heterodox cultural and religious ideas; heterodox groups then provide both leadership and an organizational focus for the opposition to the state."⁴ The existence of a fourth condition means that crises caused by economic and political impediments are not enough to provoke social revolution: a heterodox group with a dissident ideology must take up the leadership of the social protest. We can assume that economic downturns intensify elite competition, which in turn encourages ideological disparities and conflicts. The involvement of marginal groups underlines the importance of ideological heterodoxy: beyond the demand to open up the system, it carries a project of social reconstruction inspired by the particular values and goals of eccentric groups. Stated otherwise,

If the new leaders are moderate with ties to the upper class, the revolution will result only in changes in the political system, accompanied perhaps by limited social reforms. If, on the other hand, the new leaders are radical revolutionaries, the outcome may be a large-scale social transformation of the class structure. Thus, the ascendancy of ideologically driven challengers, i.e., revolutionaries, is critical in determining whether the conflicts will culminate in social revolution.⁵

Granted that economic crises intensify the need for ideological distinction, the whole question is to know whether they are enough to explain the emergence of ideological heterodoxy. As stated earlier, the materialist attempt to derive ideological beliefs from the objective conditions of existence faces a particular challenge with the type of ideologies inspiring social revolutions. Because the type involves a strong component of utopian or egalitarian inspiration, it cannot be deduced from existing conditions. The inspiration transcends the existing reality by appealing to an ideal order, and so seems to require a cultural background tinged with a millenarian tradition.

The impossibility of deducing radical ideologies from economic crises and elite competition led Goldstone to include the presence of a millenarian culture as one of the necessary conditions of social revolution. He writes:

The attempt to implant a 'new' order depends on the conjunction of *two* characteristics, one structural and one ideological. First, there must be 'marginal' elites who want not only to seize power but also to change the principles that they feel originally relegated them to marginal status. Second, there must be within the ideological framework of the society an eschatological element that can be utilized to cast the political struggle as a final end to the Old Regime, to be followed by the emergence of a new, more virtuous society.⁶

The rise of unconventional groups to social leadership is not intelligible without the legacy of a culture familiar with the idea of a coming just order. This cultural bend allows elites to justify their political ambitions in terms of a just social order displacing the evil one, terms propitious to directing change toward social revolution. Inversely, for the masses to accept eccentric groups as new leaders, a

cultural background of messianic expectation is a necessary condition. Without the influence of redemptive hope, marginal elites would be conceptualized as nothing more than usurpers.

The need to include millennialism as a condition of social revolution finds an indirect confirmation in the fact that nowadays the very concept of revolution seems out of vogue. Not that elite conflict, class struggle, and economic crises have disappeared; on the contrary, social tensions remain as acute as ever, especially in the developing world. Simply, in the era of globalization, social revolution is no longer offered as an alternative because radical ideologies, such as Marxism-Leninism, have lost their attraction, mostly as a result of the failure of socialist systems and their conversion to market economy. Our epoch, the epoch of globalization, is defined by a characteristic decline of utopia. This is best reflected in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history thesis." According to Fukuyama, the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy, illustrated by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, "may constitute the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final form of human government,' and as such constituted the 'end of history.'"⁷ Because of the termination of ideological conflicts over the best social system, new ideas imagining a different social order—other than improving the system of liberal democracy—have lost currency.

The conversion of socialist countries to capitalism sounded the death-knell—at least temporarily—of utopian revolutions. While the conversion amounted to a political revolution imparted by the need to unclog an arrested system, it had the characteristic effect of denouncing the socialist ideology and, with it, all utopian project of social reconstruction, thereby implying that "the era of chiliastic revolutions may have come to an end."⁸ The ease with which socialist systems collapsed in Eastern Europe cannot be explained without the impact of ideological disenchantment. No less than structural conditions, disillusionment with the very idea of ideology had the devastating effect of undermining the legitimacy of the socialist system. That socialist countries reverted to political revolutions through an express rejection of utopian ideologies testifies to the crucial role that utopian beliefs played in the gestation and unfolding of social revolutions.

Analyses of the great revolutions provide an even better proof of millennialism as a condition of social revolution. Alexis de Tocqueville unravels the chiliastic inspiration of the French Revolution when he defines it as "a political revolution which acted like and began to look like a religious revolution."⁹ Because structural conditions could explain neither the rise of radical groups nor the course of the Revolution, Tocqueville saw the need to involve religion to explain the impact of ideal goals. Though the Revolution undertook a systematic attack against the church and distinguished itself by the attempt to spread irreligion, it acted as a new religion by harboring, beyond the need to correct the existing system, the goal of regeneration of the human race. This redemptive objective explains why, like religion, the Revolution spread through preaching and propaganda; it also explains why it adopted a universal and abstract language

and activated powerful and violent emotions. Summarizing Tocqueville's insight, François Furet and Françoise Mélonio write:

By making the regeneration of humanity their goal, the French of the late eighteenth century sought to realize in this world an ambition that Christians seek to achieve only in the next. The Revolution inspired hopes and aroused passions comparable to those of religion, while providing only a political arena for them, thus inventing that "new kind of religion" which is revolutionary politics.¹⁰

The transition from the old religion to the new one means that France's legacy of Christian millennialism has been instrumental in casting the conflict between the traditional elite and the rising Enlightenment elite in terms of a new social order ousting injustice and oppression.

Following Tocqueville's footsteps, Nicholas Berdyaev unravels the religious inspiration of the Russian Revolution. To explain the paradox of Russia's legendary Christian fervor succumbing to atheism, Berdyaev advances the idea that the traditional fervor must have found a surrogate in the new atheism. In effect, unlike other forms of atheism, Marxist atheism does not simply reject religion; it also appropriates it by claiming to fulfill the promise of redemption through social transformations. What happened is therefore

*a transposition of religious motives and religious psychology into a non-religious or anti-religious sphere, into the region of social problems, so that the spiritual energy of religion flows into social channels, which thereby take on a religious character, and become a breeding-ground for a peculiar form of social idolatry.*¹¹

The transposition is most apparent when we see to what extent the adoption of communism flattered Russians' "feeling of a messianic mission," which "found expression in the fifteenth century, in the teaching of the monk Philotheus concerning Moscow, 'the Third Rome.'"¹² What could inflame more the messianic trend of mind of Russians than the vision of Russian communism spreading like wildfire and delivering the world from the evil of capitalism? Another outlet for transposition was the compassion for human suffering, especially for the plight of the poor, which is the very ethos of Russian literature. While the refusal of suffering brought about Russian nihilism as a form of protest against the idea of God creating an unjust world, Marx's attribution of a messianic mission to the proletariat offered the hope of deliverance from nihilism. It was the cure for a soul "troubled not so much by any conflict between Christianity and science as by that between it and social truth, by the fact that Christianity backs up social untruth."¹³

The Chinese Revolution also confirms that the legacy of millennialism is one of the conditions of social revolution. Serious studies have unraveled the existence of millenarian views in the Chinese cultural tradition. Not only does the tradition deplore the loss of an era of great harmony during which peace,

equality, and happiness prevailed, it also delivers the direction of human history by promising the restoration of the lost harmony. This redemptive goal reveals Chinese culture's predisposition to the chiliastic appeal of socialist ideology. Already, Chinese thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had attempted to revive this millenarian tradition. In particular, K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927), who as "a pivotal figure in the development of modern Chinese ideology, and an influence upon many early socialists (and the young Mao), affirmed a millenarian doctrine explicitly drawn from the 'new text' school of Confucianism."¹⁴ He impacted strongly on Mao's evolution toward Marxist socialism through a reinterpretation of Confucianism underlining "the belief that history is bound to devolve ultimately into a period of 'Great Harmony,' when differences between nations shall disappear, and all men and women shall enjoy equality."¹⁵

The more recent case of the Iranian Revolution greatly highlights the role of millenarian legacy. Any inquiry into the reasons why a radical revolution occurred in Iran when similar conditions in other Islamic countries led, at best, to moderate changes must take into consideration Iran's particular brand of Islam. Indeed, "neither the economic difficulties nor the social discontents explain the emergence of the revolutionary crisis of the late seventies. Revolutionary crisis occurred when the actions of the discontented groups were shaped by Shi'i revolutionary discourse."¹⁶ The shaping meant that the Revolution was doing more than simply correcting the deficiencies of the existing system; it was also establishing the ideal society of the Islamic state. The goal of the Islamic state radicalized the movement and promoted members of the Islamic clergy to the rank of new leaders. The Islamic brand of Shi'ism allowed the interpretation of change in terms of restoration insofar as it had "an important millenarian tenet: the belief in the appearance of the Twelfth Imam as the Mahdi to redeem the world."¹⁷ The overthrow of the shah's regime thus became a condition of redemption while the prospect of an Islamic government crowned the political struggle with the religious goal of restoring the rule of God. In turn, the scheme of restoring a lost ideal condition portrayed clerical leaders as expected redeemers.

The absence of radical revolutions in countries devoid of millenarian tradition, even though their structural conditions were propitious for radicalization, adds strength to the argument. The example that leaps to mind is India. Though India was plagued with chronic and widespread poverty that was further aggravated by the caste system, the Marxist ideology attracted few people. In particular, it did not spread largely among students as it did in some countries with similar social fractures. Hence, the idea that Marxism did not mushroom in India, not so much because the social conditions were absent or insufficient, but because Hinduism is alien to eschatological beliefs. Indeed, like all religious cultures, Hinduism establishes a tension between the mundane and the transcendental worlds. However, while cultures like Christianity retained views advocating the reduction of the separation by the reconstruction of the mundane according to the principles of the transcendental order, Hinduism went in the direction of "both the renunciation of the mundane world and emphasis on the reconstruction

of the inner experience of the believer."¹⁸ As a result, it developed ascetic exercises but remained alien to utopian visions urging for the modeling of the social system on the transcendental order. It preserved the tension between the mundane and the transcendental in a context devoid of the "concept of overcoming the tension through mundane activity (political, economic, or scientific) oriented toward reshaping or transforming the social and political order, i.e. through this-worldly activity."¹⁹

The explanation for India's deficiency in utopian thinking can be extended to the case of Japan. True, Japan's rapid modernization did not allow the development of structural conditions propitious for revolutionary change. Even so, the little attraction that Japanese intellectuals and students had for Marxist ideology demands an explanation that is not confined to the mere fact of successful modernization, given that radical groups have mushroomed in many Western countries. Though Japan adopted Confucianism and Buddhism, the way the mundane was articulated with the transcendental did not allow the rise of utopian thinking. The main reason is that "unlike in China (and Korea and Vietnam) where in principle the Emperor, even if a sacral figure, was 'under' the Mandate of Heaven, in Japan he was sacred and seen as the embodiment of the Gods and could not be held accountable to anybody."²⁰ This deification greatly reduced the tension between the mundane and the transcendental in favor of a conception conflating the two orders. The conflation of the mundane and the otherworldly did not encourage the appearance of intellectuals who would be autonomous enough to interpret the transcendental and establish norms different from the given order. Unlike China, "the Confucian scholars served in Japan at the courts of the rulers according to the criteria set up by the rulers, and they served as the rulers' will."²¹ The absence of autonomous intellectuals meant the obstruction of thoughts transcending the given and imagining the perfect social order.

The involvement of utopian thinking helps us isolate the distinct inspiration of social revolutions. Political revolutions combat all forms of tyranny and social exclusion for the purpose of opening up closed social systems. Both the elites who want the change and individuals leading the struggle speak for themselves while allying with lower classes to bring about change. In the case of social revolutions, we have elites who speak in the name of other classes, especially of lower classes, which they want to empower through a drastic makeover of the social system. The connection between millenarian traditions and social revolutions explains the tendency to represent oppressed classes, just as it hints at the cultural background that lures the masses into following heterodox leaders. What needs to be discussed now is the articulation of elite conflict with cultural unorthodoxy.

Conjunction of Political Conflict and Cultural Unorthodoxy

We have established that social revolutions are the work of aspiring elites who have developed such idiosyncratic traits and interests that a mere reshuffle of the system does not suit them. Both the social structure and the ideological makeup must be deeply altered for them to achieve political supremacy. This need for radical changes tunes them to the millenarian legacy of their culture both as a way of expressing their idiosyncrasy and connecting with the masses. In short, unorthodox elites who succeed in assuming the leadership of social protests against blocked systems initiate social revolutions.

The unusual and central role that intellectuals play in social revolutions gives a first hint of the concept of unorthodox elites. As a rule, revolutionaries do not originate from classes actively involved in productive sectors. Those who led the French Revolution did not come from the bourgeoisie; instead, the political leadership "was overwhelmingly recruited from the ranks of professionals (especially lawyers), office-holders, and intellectuals, not commercial or industrial bourgeois."²² The leaders of the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban Revolutions, too, were essentially intellectuals, and some of them came from upper-class families. The defining feature of the Iranian Revolution was that mullahs committed to the idea of Islamic republic provided political leadership.

The understanding that revolutionaries constitute unorthodox people is the very essence of Leninism. As stated in Chapter 2, Lenin insisted that revolution is impossible without the leadership of professional revolutionaries, that is, "of people whose profession is that of revolutionists."²³ People with an unwavering commitment to the socialist ideology and for whom the fomentation of revolution has become the sole purpose of life are not ordinary people. Such people are not the exclusive products of structural conditions, however appalling they may be. Cultural factors are equally necessary to shape their mental orientation.

The most natural way of understanding the involvement of radical ideologies is to say that such beliefs appear in the context of a severe elite polarization, the consequence of which is that excluded elites find no opening unless they challenge the very foundations of the social order. They thus adopt or invent utopian ideologies that advocate the empowerment of ordinary people, the only way by which they can fundamentally question the system. For them, utopianism is an avenue for power to the extent that it takes away all legitimacy from the old elite. In other words, each time the social system becomes the scene of competition between exclusive elites, utopian ideology makes its appearance and with it the possibility of social revolution.

A characteristic example of exclusive elites is the conflict between traditional oligarchies and modernizing elites. When traditional elites monopolize political power through a closed system backed by a traditional ideology, no other alternative is left for aspiring elites than to project radical changes aimed at altering both the social structure and its ideological components. Advocating such change necessitates the type of ideology that both mobilizes the masses and propels aspiring elites to leadership. In brief, ideological heterodoxy flows from

the commitment to liberate the masses, which commitment is primarily a necessary weapon for competing elites to rise to power.

Some such approach, no doubt quite tempting, raises a serious problem. As already indicated, by deducing the commitment to radical ideologies from the need of political struggle, the theory intimates that elites do not really believe in the noble ideas they preach, that the latter are simply cover-ups for the conquest of power, which is the real objective. In allowing elite groups to speak in the name of the people, the radical ideology gathers the popular support that they need to achieve their sole objective, that is, the seizure of power.

In a way, such an understanding brings us back to Marx's idea of ideology as false consciousness. For Marx, as reflections of material interests, ideas serve the ruling class only if they distort reality, that is, idealize class interest into universal interest, thereby providing the normative shell necessary to extract obedience from the masses. In endorsing the deceptive intent of ideology, we question the sincerity of the ideal commitment of competing elites, and so fail to take seriously the concept of unorthodox elites. The concept signifies the appearance, not of people smart enough to hide their real motive behind lofty ideas, but of people who have developed eccentric beliefs and identify with them. They are like religious heretics but with secular goals; they are the outcome not only of social conditions, but also of cultural developments. Consequently, their commitment to radical ideologies does not have one single explanation. Chalmers Johnson gives an idea of the complexity involved in the formation of radical groups when he assigns the production of ideologies to "individuals who may be motivated by personal psychological needs, life experiences, disequilibrium-induced tensions, or a combination of all these forces."²⁴ Moreover, the attempt to reduce the appearance of radical ideology to the political ambition of aspiring elites is insufficient for the simple reason that sectarian groups exist prior to the revolutionary situation.

The point is that revolutionary ideologies are difficult to pin down to particular interests because of the involvement of utopian elements. Karl Mannheim's distinction between ideology and utopia could be of some help here. According to him, if one confines utopia to the "type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order, a distinction is set up between the utopian and the ideological states of mind."²⁵ Put differently, the will to change the existing order drives utopia; it expresses dissatisfaction with reality and wants to transform it. Not so with ideology, which is instead the thinking of people who are satisfied and interested in maintaining things as they are. The need to maintain the status quo defines ideology; the need to change the status quo demarcates utopia from ideology. While interests easily explain the defense of the status quo, the commitment to utopian change seems to add cultural conditionings, given that utopia transcends the realm of immediate interests. That is why Goldstone's emphasis on the presence of eschatological traditions is quite relevant. Cultures that exhibit eschatological traditions are liable to

nurture radical groups, which become influential as crises in society deepen and seem without solution.

The appeal to utopia explains why groups who often do not even belong to the wronged people lead social revolutions. As one author says,

If one runs down the list of "causes" taken up by student activists, in rare cases are demonstrations directed at improving the lot of the protesters themselves; identification with the oppressed is a more important motivating factor than an actual sense of immediate personal oppression.²⁶

Had revolutions been initiated by the wronged, it would not have been necessary to emphasize the role of ideology. Since their interests are directly at stake, their protest is a normal reaction and does not need the spur of visionary inspiration. Social revolutions, however, are triggered by individuals who even belong to privileged classes and claim to represent, not themselves, but the downtrodden people. The rebellion of these individuals is not intelligible without the involvement of a messianic inspiration. Revolutionary leaders such as Lenin, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Mao, etc. came from well-to-do families. The rejection of materialist reductionism thus means the recognition that "self-interest, which is not necessarily economic, is often counterbalanced by altruism; and both are sometimes overshadowed by idealism."²⁷

The only way to deal with the question of why elite groups opt for utopian projects of social construction rather than reformism is to focus on competing elites with idiosyncratic characteristics derived from both sociopolitical and cultural conditionings. The notion of unorthodox elite signifies the conjunction of political exclusion with cultural heterodoxy, which heterodoxy feeds on millenarian traditions as a result of which it assumes a redemptive vocation. Let us now see, in very general terms, whether a context of political conflicts involving unorthodox elites did define the 1974 uprising in Ethiopia.

Elite Conflicts and Cultural Heterodoxy in Ethiopia

Our basic assumption is that radicalization is to be found at the crossroads of intense elite conflicts and eschatological cultures. The conditions for elite polarization were indeed quite active in the imperial regime. The blockage of the circulation of elites accurately defines Haile Selassie's regime: not only as an aristocratic system it offered no opening to commoners, but also one ethnic group, the Amhara, dominated its upper level. This does not mean that individuals who come from humble origins did not rise; they did, but they were few in number and had authority only to the extent that they remained Haile Selassie's protégés. The blockage of social mobility took an acute form as modern educated individuals saw their ambition increasingly thwarted by a closed aristocracy stubbornly defending its privileges. Though modern education was praised and encouraged, educated people had no say in the formulation of policies; they were simply asked to put their skills at the service of a regime that excluded

them politically. This exclusion became increasingly intolerable as economic crises drastically narrowed employment possibilities for high school and university graduates and dropouts and made improvement of conditions of life unattainable for salaried employees. For the rising educated elite, the situation offered no other way out than a complete overthrow of the old elite.

Let us note that the Ethiopian situation recalled the conditions that prevailed in pre-revolutionary France, Russia, and China. As was the case in these countries, in Ethiopia, too, an outdated landed class supported by an imperial state was obstructing the rise of a modernizing elite and, consequently, the modernization of the country. The existence of an *ancien regime*, essentially defined by the social prominence of a landed aristocracy and the political system of absolute monarchy with a traditional ideology of legitimation—the consequence of which was a very sluggish pace of economic growth—indicates how closely Ethiopia reproduced the structural conditions that led to social revolutions in other countries.

The condition that exposed Ethiopia to the most radical revolution in Africa is to be found in the historical anomaly of an African country that succeeded in preserving its independence. In Africa and other colonized countries, colonization has deeply altered social formations by promoting modern sectors at the expense of traditional structures. Where colonization has had deep impact, it has also entailed the marginalization of traditional elites in favor of modern elites, especially Western-educated elites. The fact that Ethiopia escaped direct colonization created the unique situation of modernization being initiated while the traditional oligarchy was still in full control. The outcome was the growing disparity between the old and the emerging modernizing elites, which disparity became confrontational as the old elite stubbornly clung to its privileges. Ethiopia's course of development thus became markedly different from that of Japan where precisely a traditional oligarchy, preserved thanks to the repulsion of colonialism, accepted far-reaching reforms, thereby avoiding the confrontation between modern and traditional elites.

The absence of structural reforms in Ethiopia established nothing more than the possibility of political revolution. The political overthrow of the landed aristocracy was enough to open up the system: neither the complete transformation of the class system nor the adoption of Marxism-Leninism was necessary to give a political representation to the modernizing elite. How, then, is one to explain the drift toward social revolution? For many students of Ethiopia, the question amounts to asking why the excluded educated elite felt the need to speak in the name of the interests of peasants and workers. The overwhelming answer to this question emphasizes the inability of the educated elite to effectively overthrow the old elite and its imperial state without the support of the masses. The need to gain the support of the masses, it is said, brought the educated elite round to the idea of espousing the Marxist-Leninist ideology.

According to Gebru Mersha, radicalization prevailed because "liberalism as an alternative ideology did not have a strong material base and even as an incip-

ient tendency was already discredited."²⁸ The extremely slow economic development and the suppression of political freedom under the imperial regime, together with the dominance of foreign capital, did not allow the creation of conditions favoring bourgeois forces. The educated elite had no other option than to mobilize the oppressed against the imperial regime by championing their interests. The incapacities induced by the closed society explain the drift toward a radical course.

John Markakis has articulated the modernizing elite's option for a radical ideology in Marxist terms. For him as well, the radicalization of students and intellectuals was a product of the social blockage. If students felt the need to read Lenin and found him relevant, it was because his radical ideas were reflective of their own situation. He writes:

The abrupt narrowing of its social horizon transformed the educated petty bourgeoisie into a disgruntled and politically dissident class. Its subordinate economic status and dim prospects for the future within the economic structure of the *ancien regime* turned this social group in a radical direction, which led it to make common cause with the workers and peasants.²⁹

Having no capital and seeing no possibility of evolving into a bourgeois class in a social system protecting the hegemony of the landed aristocracy and the dominance of foreign capital, the petty bourgeoisie increasingly associated its fate with the cause of the oppressed. By challenging the dominance of foreign capital and their domestic allies, radicalism articulated the common grievances of petty bourgeois sectors, workers, and peasants, and so became their rallying platform. The root of radicalization of the petty bourgeoisie is thus to be found in its predicament, which offered no way out except through an alliance with the working class and peasants. In default of any possible alliance with upper classes, the petty bourgeoisie had to make common cause with the oppressed. The perceived solidarity of interests between the masses and the petty bourgeoisie made the ideology of Marxism-Leninism appealing to students, teachers, young officers, and middle-strata state employees. This very radicalization propelled them to the leadership of the social protests. Moreover, the common cause was not simply circumstantial: beyond the purpose of overthrowing the *ancien regime*, it included a project of social development beneficial to the petty-bourgeoisie and the masses alike. Notably, the prospect of nationalization "would bring assets under its [petty-bourgeoisie] control in a greatly expanded state sector."³⁰

In assigning the radicalization of the leadership of the social protests to social conditions, Markakis significantly downplays the part played by altruism. He thus follows the Marxist principle of making ideology into a mere reflection of social conditions. His approach would have been acceptable had the radical ideology been the product of workers and peasants. The fact that representatives of the petty bourgeoisie—students and intellectuals in particular—introduced the ideology invites the suspicion that the masses are used to empower the petty bourgeoisie. One has the choice of two things: either some part of altruism allows petty bourgeois elements to rise and speak in the name of the masses or the

radical ideology is a fraudulent discourse designed to fool the masses into supporting a separate new elite. The suspicion becomes overwhelming when the Marxist analysis is applied in social conditions displaying a working class in its very early infancy. Short of recognizing the inspiration of altruism or idealism, the representation of workers by non-workers hardly escapes the charge of manipulation.

Markakis's analysis would have provided a more reliable insight if it were consistent with what a real alliance between the petty bourgeoisie, workers, and peasants would have meant. Alliance maintains differences so that the representatives of one class do not speak in the name of another class. Instead, the recognition of crucial common interests brings them together against a common enemy. But then, the most consistent alliance would have been the striving for a liberal society through a political rather than a social revolution. The one objection that we can effectively make against Markakis's analysis is that the petty bourgeoisie need not have adopted the radical ideology of socialism to obtain the support of the working masses. Liberal proposals, such as freedom of expression and organization, free election, government responsible to the parliament, etc. would have mobilized the working masses, all the more so as socialism was not the workers' initial battle-cry. The revolutionary ideology of the radical section of the petty bourgeoisie, and not the needs of working classes, introduced the idea of socialism.

Once radicalism is adopted, reformism is disparaged: it is equated with opportunism and invites the criticism that it opens the system to new elites but gives nothing substantial to the masses. Rejecting categorically reformism, *Challenge*, the Journal of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America, writes: "Let us all realize that to bog down oneself in reformism, today, is indeed an exercise in futility. Every good intentioned endeavor to help the people which is not linked to the revolution of the masses *will not simply work!*"³¹

The most reliable and coherent alternative to understand the impact of ideology is to refer to cultural conditioning. If we want to avoid deception and allow altruism to play a part, we must admit the possibility of culture inspiring attitudes and actions in an autonomous fashion. Additionally, we must concede that challenging social situations can ignite certain dormant cultural dispositions, especially millenarian beliefs. Their revival explains why some groups assume a redemptive vocation and speak in the name of the oppressed.

Most salient among the many factors that defined the Ethiopian student movement was the rise of a messianic vocation. The following quotation taken from *Challenge* gives a good illustration:

The task of awakening our country from her age-old slumber and liberating our people from the iron grip of remorseless tyranny falls on our shoulders. This mission and duty cannot be denied by any Ethiopian, for sooner or later, the tide of history will inevitably herald the victory of our oppressed masses. And all the reactionaries and opportunists, the tired scribes and apologists of the feudal system will be called to answer for their crimes.³²

In addition to portraying a social atmosphere impregnated with the spirit of the Last Judgment, the quotation describes the educated elite, not as a partner of the oppressed people, but as their redeemer. Clearly, the revolutionary elite was the one group which, having committed class suicide, fully identified with the oppressed. The Ethiopian Revolution cannot become intelligible unless the source of this messianic mentality is discovered. The rise of messianic mentality explains, in turn, the formation of an unorthodox elite on a full collision course not only with the old ruling class, but also with liberal groups.

Where else can one look for the source of the messianic mentality but in the biblical traditions of Ethiopia? But before delving into this matter, we must discuss the factors that molded the eccentricity of the educated elite. Chief among these factors was the impact of Western education, which I have thoroughly analyzed in a previous book titled *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960-1974*.³³ In that book, I illustrate how the entire educational system, completely copied from the West, alienated the educated elite from the society and its cultural legacies. What was taught in modern schools and colleges not only left out the history and legacies of Ethiopia, but also created a mindset indiscriminately rejectionist of whatever is traditional. The book argues that one of the conditions of radicalization of students and intellectuals was the uprootedness imparted by Westernization, obvious as it is that so disparaging a system of education could not but unleash the desire to get rid of everything and start anew. The study of the educational system thus delivers the main factor that shaped the educated elite into an eccentric or unorthodox group.

Uprootedness is not yet revolutionary; it becomes so only if it encounters a millenarian predisposition. That is why the impact of Western education must be integrated into the general assessment of the mentioned book, which is that the radical orientation of students and intellectuals has its roots in the encounter of an uprooting education entirely copied from the West with a cultural legacy prone to messianic escapades. Even as the imported education was undermining the legacy, the extremely critical spirit of Marxist ideology emerged as the most consistent form of Westernization and its message of total liberation as the most alluring substitute for the messianic longing. To the extent that Marxism-Leninism advocates both the rejection of Western capitalism and traditional classes and culture, it stimulated a renovated nationalism but based on the messianic vocation granting the educated elite the historic role of liberating the masses. The definition of itself as a redeemer on account of its acquired knowledge and righteousness provided the substance of the educated elite's increasing cultural unorthodoxy. Since the ability of Marxism-Leninism to transmute uprootedness into a redemptive vocation accounts for much of its attractiveness, this study fully endorses and relies on my previous book's findings, to wit, that inherited cultural features made Ethiopian students and intellectuals sensitive to the chiliastic appeal of the Marxist doctrine.

What is most striking about Ethiopia, especially to foreign scholars, is how extensively references of biblical nature permeate the course of its secular history. Few nations have so thoroughly biblicalized the context and meaning of their

history as the Ethiopian people. Nothing significant happened in Ethiopia without involving religious meaning; in particular, no adverse event occurred without stirring the prophecy of a coming savior. If we limit to recent history, the prophecy of a savior from the danger of the Era of the Princes set the cultural background to the rise of Emperor Tewodros, who defined himself as "the man whom God had raised up 'out the dust' to save Ethiopia."³⁴ The colonial encirclement ushered in another prophesy that coincided with the rise of Menilik II, who thus became the savior, "the second great Menelik, as had been prophesied at his birth; he would restore the grandeur and power of Christian Ethiopia."³⁵

Take the national epic of Ethiopia, namely, the *Kibre Negast* (the Glory of the Kings).³⁶ The story of the Queen of Sheba recounts an epic history involving the Solomonic dynasty, the possession of the Ark of Covenant, the unity of church and state, the promotion of the emperor as the elect of God, and Ethiopians as God's favored nation in place of the sinful Israelites. Merid W. Aregay defines the *Kibre Negast* as a "millenarian ideology" promising the final triumph of Christian Ethiopia over the Muslim countries by which it is surrounded.³⁷ Only God's special concern for Ethiopia can guarantee victory over such powerful enemies. This millenarian belief defined the state as the guardian of the true faith and of God's favored nation, and so endowed political power with a religious assignment. One can see how this cultural disposition can be easily seduced by the utopian goals of the modern socialist state as defined by Marxism-Leninism.

Interestingly, the advancement of Western modernity at the expense of Ethiopian traditional values and institutions has also been initially conceptualized in eschatological terms borrowed from Christianity. From my childhood, I vividly remember monks going from house to house to announce the impending arrival of the Apocalypse, their belief being that the end of the world is how the features of Ethiopia are saved from the incursions of Europe, henceforth equated with the Antichrist.

The millenarian dimension of Ethiopian culture enables us to understand the formation of elites with a revolutionary intent. When elites present their rise in eschatological terms, they signify a total change, a new beginning. They thus openly advocate discontinuity with the past: change is how the young, the modern, the revolutionary throws away the outdated and the obstructionist. True, not all countries that faced serious external and internal challenges have felt the need for eschatological beliefs. But if millenarian elements are constitutive of the national culture, then challenges can pave the way for a full-blown messianic spirit, the very spirit that can find delight in Marx's eschatological view of history.³⁸

Add to the millenarian facet the existence of a tradition of critical discourse against the state in the Ethiopian cultural makeup. We saw that in Japan the deification of the emperor had blocked the development of dissident intellectuals by identifying the mundane and the transcendental. Different was the tendency in Ethiopia: the principle of the unity of church and state encouraged the subju-

gation of the political order to the beliefs and ethical canons of Ethiopian Christianity. The conception making the state into the sword of the church incited criticisms and rebellions every time emperors and regional lords failed to accomplish their protective mission. A characteristic example is the abdication of King Susenyos in the seventeenth century following a widespread civilian and clerical unrest caused by his conversion to Catholicism under the influence of Jesuit priests. A more recent example is when Lij Iyasu, emperor-designate, was deposed in 1916 because the Ethiopian church excommunicated him on ground of sympathy for Islam.

Beyond encouraging critical discourses, the principle of the unity of the political and the religious has at times propelled sectarian movements. A typical illustration is the development in the fifteenth century of a movement of rebellious monks known as the *Deqie Estifanos*. The movement brought serious troubles in the church and the state until it was destroyed with extreme ferocity. The reason for the ferocious reaction was the critical ideas that the rebellious monks professed against the secular powers. For instance, in one exchange with the emperor, a representative of the movement reminded him that he was emperor, not for his own glory, but to serve God.³⁹ The reminder explains why the followers of the movement broke the tradition and "refuse to prostrate themselves before the Emperor."⁴⁰ According to the Ethiopian scholar, Maimire Mennasemay, who has done an extensive study of the movement, only the recognition of the existence of a tradition of utopian thinking in Ethiopia can satisfactorily explain this remarkable phenomenon of the rise of a dissident movement from a church reputed for its conservatism and authoritarianism.⁴¹

I am reluctant to follow Maimire when he speaks of the existence of social utopianism in Ethiopia because such an assumption conflicts with the deeply held attachment of Ethiopians to social hierarchy.⁴² I also maintain that the generally accepted principle of the unity of church and state is enough to account for the tradition of dissident religious movements and critical discourses against secular powers. The principle demands that political power be subjected to religious norms, and so invites political criticisms.

What is important for our purpose is the existence within a conservative church of the possibility of autonomous thinking thanks to the injunction of unity between religion and politics, which is the cornerstone of Ethiopian cultural fabric. This disposition toward autonomy explains the ease with which dissident thinking proliferated among intellectuals and students when Haile Selassie's regime failed to live up to its promise of modernization. Better still, the legacy of judging the state according to the rule of service to God could not but favor radicalism. Just as monks rebelled in the name of the state as an instrument of God, so too did modern Ethiopia's Western-educated elites when they submitted the imperial regime and the Ethiopian society to the norms of Marxism-Leninism. The submission injected the intensity of a religious injunction, given that Marxism-Leninism had become a substitute for their cultural alienation.

The relevance of this analysis essentially depends on its ability to clarify the radicalization of the Derg, which was responsible for both the downfall of the

old regime and the adoption and implementation of socialist policy. Let us first note that the composition of the Derg made it into an unorthodox group. Composed of junior and noncommissioned officers and privates (the latter being the majority), the Derg was an uncharacteristic military group and hence an atypical political contender. As a result, it was plunged in a bitter form of conflict as soon as it claimed to represent the armed forces and seized state power. Neither the educated elite, nor the traditional oligarchy, still less revolutionary groups and senior officers showed any readiness to cede power to subaltern army men most of whom had barely finished high school. The bitter and bloody struggle that followed is not intelligible unless we refer to a conflict for power rendered unusually acute and stormy by the intervention of an unexpected and unentitled rival. The unusual composition of the Derg called for a form of power struggle that involved eccentric beliefs for the simple reason that the achievement of hegemony required nothing less than the complete dismantling of the old order. Even the political removal of the old oligarchy and the adoption of liberal reforms were not enough to procure political supremacy for the Derg.

That is why the radical ideology of the civilian revolutionary elite came in handy. The Derg appropriated the Marxist-Leninist ideology for the same reason that intellectuals and students had appropriated it, namely, the complete destruction of the old order. Not only did Marxism-Leninism discredit the old elite, but most of all, as a revolutionary discourse, it legitimized the seizure of power by junior officers and enlisted men, thereby entitling them to become a serious rival to the vociferous revolutionary elite of the civilian society. More than the direct influence of the civilian left, the need to retain power convinced the Derg to profess socialist ideals.

This ideological shift could not have occurred without the cultural atmosphere caused by the delegitimizing discourse of the educated elite. By attacking liberal as well as traditional values and promoting socialism, the civilian left was preparing its own ascension to power. However, in thus discrediting liberal values and institutions together with the aristocratic values of the imperial regime, the vociferous group completely lifted the lid off the messianic complex of Ethiopian culture. The total discredit of established hierarchy released the vocation of redeemer, and this fired up many groups and individuals while inducing into ordinary people the malleability to follow new political prophets. Enlisted military men and young officers felt the calling and, filled with the spirit of redemption, became bold enough to tear to pieces what they have been trained to revere and defend. The Derg's far-reaching revolutionary measures are not comprehensible without the injection into the needs of the political struggle the excitement of a messianic calling emanating from the inherited culture. Among these military men, one person in particular received the calling from a position of personal resentment and avenging craze, to wit, Mengistu Haile Mariam: in the fashion of Emperor Tewodros, he perceived himself as the redeemer who rose from insignificance to save the oppressed.

The discredit of liberal and traditional values also explains the ethnicization of the political conflict. Insofar as the discourse of the revolutionary elite demeaned national traditions and values, even challenged Ethiopian nationhood, which it identified with imperial oppression, it was bound to revive local identities. The construction of Ethiopia as an empire in which one ethnic group, the Amhara, dominates other conquered and subdued ethnic groups has its root in the requirement of elites competing for power. Marginalized elites could not hope to wage a successful struggle unless they ethnicized their cause, thereby developing eccentric identities. Because liberalism was not enough to question the Amhara political and cultural hegemony, the first weapon to be used against the system was to remove the nobility and the imperial state by advocating a socialist society. Once liberal reform was out of the picture, ethnicization stepped in with its unique ability to give local elites the exclusive right to represent their ethnic groups and speak in their name. Indeed, what is characteristic of ethnicity is that it excludes elites belonging to other ethnic groups as strangers, outsiders, thereby giving a monopoly of representation to the elite group that claims to be native of the ethnic community.

Elite conflicts explain why the Ethiopian educated elite first identified with Marxism-Leninism and then gave birth to splinter groups advocating ethnicity. Only as representatives of oppressed ethnic groups rather than of oppressed classes could marginalized elites further the political ambition of enthroning regional elites to the detriment of the cosmopolitan or pan-Ethiopian elite. Evidently, ethnicity is a construct of disgruntled and marginalized elites whose ambition for an exclusive form of political prominence could not be achieved by means of liberal institutions. What else could the commitment to exclusionary politics invite but the formation of sectarian identities? Consequently, splinter groups first relied on Marxism-Leninism to block out liberalism and then asserted their natural and exclusive right to represent oppressed groups by excluding other competing elites.

This is to say that ethnicity, which is allegedly rooted in peasant aspiration, is actually the product of an exclusive form of elite competition. Alluding to Tigray's fierce ethnicization, Gebru Tareke rightly writes: "Contrary to the TPLF's claims, the current 'nationalist' sentiment has been thrust upon the peasantry by the intelligentsia."⁴³ Here too, ethnicization encountered cultural inheritances: the awakened millenarian ethos of Tigreans was shifted from the national scene to the narrow objective of redeeming and empowering an oppressed ethnic group. While the necessities of political conflict explain the move toward sectarianism, the self-portrait of the Tigrean educated elite as a redeemer draws from Ethiopia's millenarian tradition.

The Role of the Individual in History

One characteristic of revolutions is the decisive role that individuals, acting as leaders, have played both in their gestation and unfolding. To cite some examples, Maximilien Robespierre, Napoleon Bonaparte, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph

Stalin, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Ayatollah Khomeini, etc. are individuals not only closely associated with social revolutions, but also with the belief that the course of things would have been different without them. As such, these individuals are classified in the category of great men or leaders, with the understanding that the adjective "great" refers more to the political impact than to the moral worth of their actions. However, theories of revolution, with the notable exception of Marxism, seldom deal with the role of individuals, mostly because their insistence on the determining impact of structural factors leave little room for any decisive role of individuals. As we shall see, even Marxism gives individuals so limited a role that it ends up reinforcing the determining role of objective factors.

On the subject of the role of individuals, the Ethiopian Revolution presents a challenging particularity in that it is hardly intelligible without the central role of the Derg, which was an ad hoc military committee composed of people not known for their prior commitment to Marxism-Leninism. What is more, the radicalization of the Derg and its very survival are unthinkable without the decisive impact of its leader, namely, Mengistu, the near-consensus belief being that the course of the Ethiopian Revolution would have been quite different without him. In thus underlining the role played by an exclusive group and its leader, the Ethiopian Revolution becomes a typical case stating that no account of revolutions is satisfactory until the undeniable role of individuals is reconciled with structural explanations.

The controversy on the role of individuals in history has crystallized around three differing positions. First is the position of those who believe that great leaders make history. Second is the opposite view in that it considers such leaders as nothing more than products of their social environment. Third is the dialectical approach through the suggestion that individuals become leaders when their exceptional qualities reflect or coincide with social needs.

Eminently represented by Thomas Carlyle, who wrote that "Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here," the first position essentially argues that the world was able to advance toward progress thanks to the decisive contributions of the great heroes of culture, knowledge, and politics in the large sense of the word.⁴⁴ For this theory, it stands to reason that, without the leadership, inventions, or beliefs of great men, nothing of what humanity is supposed to have accomplished would have come to pass.

The immediate question that comes to mind is, as Leo Tolstoy, a severe critic of the great-man theory, puts it, "how individual men made peoples act according to their will, and what governed the will of these men themselves."⁴⁵ Most premodern thinkers have argued that individuals have the power to move nations to the extent that they act as agents of the divine will. The obvious implication of this position is the belief that God's will determines the course of history. As to modern thinkers, reluctant to involve God in a secular world by referring to "men endowed with divine power and directly guided by the will of

a divinity," they staged "either heroes endowed with extraordinary, superhuman capacities, or simply men of the most diverse qualities, from monarchs to journalists, who guide the masses."⁴⁶ The term mostly used by modern thinkers to define the extraordinary impact that great men have on their society is charisma. It owes its academic acceptability to the authority of Max Weber, who defines it as that by which an individual "is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities."⁴⁷

The substitution of the divine will by outstanding qualities does not remove the objection according to which such a transcending role of individuals gives a "narrow, one-dimensional, and overly romantic" understanding of history.⁴⁸ The approach ignores the role of followers, the impacts of objective conditions, that is, of social actors and their needs. Moreover, great men always arise in situations of deep crises and, in many ways, respond to them. The description of them as simply emerging and imposing their will is an abusive simplification that takes the shadow for the substance. Arguing that only empty knowledge results from conceptions of history assigning a determining role to outstanding individuals rather than to social forces, Tolstoy reduces the input of great men to a nominal function, stating that "the so-called great men are labels that give the event a name, which, just as with labels, has the least connection of all with the event itself."⁴⁹

Going to the other extreme, the position maintaining that great men are just products of their time credits itself for its scientific approach, since in relegating outstanding individuals to the status of effects it does no more than confirm that objective forces, and not the will of individuals, govern history. Besides Tolstoy, the other prominent thinker who attacked the great-man theory is Herbert Spencer. Specifically referring to Carlyle, Spencer retorts that the main causes of whatever great men are said to have accomplished are found in the past so that "before he [the great man] can re-make his society, his society must make him."⁵⁰ The defining feature of the rejection of the great-man theory is reductionism in that it leaves no room for the particular input of people with extraordinary qualities. The fact that outstanding individuals appear is itself simply part of social determinism.

The issue here is that reductionism cannot establish concretely how a given social situation directly produces such outstanding individuals as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Lenin, Mahatma Gandhi, or Martin Luther King. In what way and what specific social forces can generate people with extraordinary abilities? So long as such questions are left unanswered, the alleged deterministic link between social forces and outstanding individuals remains an empty statement. That is why the dialectical approach argues in favor of a synthetic conception that begins by accepting that individuals do influence the life of society by virtue of their uncommon abilities. However, the dialectical position also emphasizes that the exceptional qualities of an individual can play a role only to the extent that they relate to social needs. In other words, the approach wants to

navigate between two extremes by showing that outstanding individuals do influence the course of history because societies need their exceptional abilities.

Frederick Engels has articulated a version of the dialectical approach through the interplay between chance and necessity. He attempts to avoid reductionism by suggesting that the appearance of outstanding individuals is a matter of chance. On the other hand, his belief in economic determinism leads him to maintain that whatever occurs by chance is molded in accordance with necessity so that the latter always triumphs. In this way, chance becomes an accomplice of necessity. Consequently, as pure chance, the unique ability of an individual is simply a contingent given; what changes it into greatness is the social need that it happens to reflect. To quote Engels, "that such and such a man and precisely that man arises at a particular time in a particular country is, of course, pure chance. But cut him out and there will be a demand for such a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found."⁵¹ Thus, as an individual, the appearance of Napoleon was chance, but not the fact that the French Revolution needed his military genius to defend itself. The understanding that necessity creates its own chance means, therefore, that had it not been for the actual Napoleon, another military genius would have appeared to fulfill the same function.

Is Engels's theory really different from the reductionist position? Doubtless, it involves chance and contingency, but the view that necessity always prevails seems to draw us back into a reductionist position. If, in the final analysis, the leader is merely a response to social needs, then "the leader's personality is not the main explanation for events."⁵² The perspective excludes the impact of charisma, of the extraordinary ability of some individuals. What is forcefully determining is the social situation, which picks, so to speak, the right person. Without the needs of the French Revolution and its galvanizing power, the military genius of Napoleon would have been useless and irrelevant. Obviously, some such approach is too deterministic for a process like history, which is full of contingent happenings and unexpected consequences. Moreover, it is not clear in what sense Napoleon was really a response to the needs of the French Revolution. Was the reinstitution of monarchy expressive of the need of the Revolution? What about the conquest of Russia? To what specific need did it respond, all the more so as it brought about defeat? What else could explain these events but motivations inherent in Napoleon's personality?

Take the case of the Russian Revolution: given the conditions under which the Revolution occurred, could someone other than Lenin have the authority and vision to launch Russia into a revolutionary process of unheard magnitude and depth soon followed by a no less unparalleled project of socialist construction? Can it be convincingly maintained that, had it not been Lenin, another individual would have successfully guided the Bolshevik party in such a highly adventurous course of action? In the same line of thinking, Hitler responded to Germany's distress and humiliation caused by military defeat, but his response changed the course of history, since no German had anticipated that the rehabili-

tation of the country would require the establishment of the Nazi system and the attempted conquest of the world. A contemporary example is Nelson Mandela. He is a great man, not because he reflected social needs, but because he diverted South Africa from a direction that many people had considered inevitable. Indeed, Mandela,

not only strengthened the black people's belief in their ability but also by his moral influence (through mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)) prevented awful bloody revenge on the whites, revenge that was perceived by many blacks as a natural and more just step.⁵³

From Reflection to Independent Variable

What these examples suggest is that individuals are great insofar as they are capable of autonomous actions, actions transcending the social environment. This does not mean a return to the great-man theory, so long as it is understood that social needs constitute an indispensable condition for the emergence of outstanding leaders. Indeed, without the needs of the French Revolution, Napoleon would have lived an ordinary life and his military genius would have been simply wasted. Similarly, cancel the events prior to Hitler's rise, and his oratorical skills would be devoid of social respondents. Accordingly, social needs are necessary to set the stage for the rise of great leaders. This idea that historical and objective conditions create demands for the particular talents of individuals means that outstanding leaders emerge in conjunction with deep social crises, but also that such leaders are not confined to social wants.

As the term "crisis" suggests, the emphasis must be not only on the occurrence of change, but also on change occurring under difficult conditions, as is often the case with revolutions. The arduous conditions require that people rise above themselves, that they do things that go beyond the ordinary. In such a situation of hardship, a charismatic leader—a leader capable of inspiring confidence, of devising successful means, or of providing the appropriate vision—is indeed needed. Some such situation also implicates the needs of followers, of those who need to be inspired and provided with solutions. The conjugation of what the leader can provide with the needs of followers shows that charisma is their common product; it can even be said that the needs of followers is what activates the dormant or implicit ability of the leader. To quote Thomas E. Dow,

For Weber, charismatic authority exists when an individual's claim to "supernatural, superhuman or . . . exceptional powers" is acknowledged by others as a valid basis for their participation in a program of action which seeks to remedy "extraordinary . . . distress or [guarantee] the success of extraordinary ventures."⁵⁴

The fact that followers spurred by their own needs assign extraordinary powers to leaders, thereby providing them with authority, does not mean that leaders will not use their authority to influence events on their own. On the con-

trary, the more leaders have charismatic authority, the less they behave as mere spokespersons or representatives of followers. They thus assume the power of independent variable shaping events in accordance with their own idiosyncrasy. Stated otherwise, what great leaders have accomplished

cannot be explained as a simple reflection or function of the social class, material interests or social situation of those originally involved. . . . On the contrary, these men offered transcendent goals and revolutionary ideas which must be considered independent variables in the process of historical transformation.⁵⁵

This approach retains the impact of structural factors in that charismatic leaders reflect social needs, but also insists that the reflection mixes with autonomous inputs of charismatic individuals, inputs that followers may not even want.

Seeing the role of the Derg and, in particular, of Mengistu, the Ethiopian Revolution invites an approach that allows the possibility of autonomous actions on the part of individuals. Neither the genesis of the Derg nor the rise of Mengistu could be explained solely as mere outcomes of objective processes. True, given the lack of organized oppositions in the civilian society and its multiple conflicts, the military were bound to play a significant role. They had already manifested their political ambition, for instance when the Imperial Guard attempted a *coup d'état* in 1960. In addition, the army was the only organized force, and this at a time when military intervention was the rule rather than the exception in most Third World countries. Even so, military intervention in Ethiopia could have taken so many different forms. For instance, a *coup d'état* by senior officers or by young officers with a nationalist ideology could not be ruled out.

Of all the possibilities, the formation of the Derg by an elective process that excluded ranks above major and produced a majority formed of noncommissioned officers and privates who, for the most part, did not know each other, was not the most likely outcome. Even more unlikely was the survival of the Derg in a highly adverse situation combining widespread civilian unrests, military invasion from a neighboring country, and assaults by guerrilla fighters. For most observers, the Derg's survival is inextricably linked with the leadership of Mengistu, who not only incarnated its radicalization, but also used his position to rise to absolute, dictatorial power, thereby imparting to the Revolution a path bearing his marks. The course taken by the Revolution is not intelligible unless it is shown how Mengistu's leadership role transited from reflecting social needs to an independent variable under the impact of his specific personality and vision.

My attempt to include Mengistu in a discussion about charismatic leaders may generate objections for the obvious reason that there is a widespread resistance in calling Mengistu a great man or leader. He was cruel and committed numerous atrocities, but above all, he failed in his endeavors: he lost power following a series of military defeats by northern insurgents and his socialism produced none of the expected benefits, not to speak of recurring famines that sullied his rule. Since failure rather than success defined his regime, the

qualification of "great man" may seem hardly justifiable indeed. All the same, the fact of failure and heinous crimes do not prevent the presence of charisma. After all, though such leaders as Hitler, Stalin, Napoleon, and Mao-Tse-tung, to name a few, have registered failures and committed crimes, they are considered charismatic leaders. So is there a way of responding to objections while maintaining the undeniably influential role of Mengistu?

Charisma and Narcissism

One way of resolving the issue is to clearly indicate that "charisma, as Weber pointed out, is a value-free term and . . . charismatic leaders may—at the least—involve their followers in a cruel hoax or, as in Hitler's case, an epic tragedy."⁵⁶ As a value-free concept, charisma simply refers to the power that some individuals have to inspire people and lead groups, but with the understanding that the concept does not necessarily have a moral connotation. Still, charisma as a form of leadership predictive of better or worse outcomes, though conceptually valid, does not satisfy our urge to clearly differentiate such leaders as Gandhi, King, Mandela, from Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Pol Pot. As Micha Popper writes, "history has seen leaders like Hitler, who were outstanding in the basic sense of leadership; they influenced and even swept up millions of people, although their leadership was blatantly immoral and even destructive."⁵⁷ This need to distinguish between outstanding leaders with positive outcomes from those with destructive results shifts our inquiry from the ethical to the psychological realm.

To analyze the influence and the destructive outcomes of leaders like Hitler, the psychological perspective undertakes deep explorations of their motivations. What motivates such leaders and why are they able to rise to power? Numerous studies use the term "narcissism" as a key to understanding both the motivation and the ability to influence others of leaders like Hitler or Stalin. The presence of charisma is recognized but as disfigured by a pathological drive termed "narcissism." Hence, my thesis is: the radicalization of the Derg and the rise of Mengistu, as well as his fall, require an explanation involving the impact of his narcissistic personality.

Narcissism "refers to a personality type that has an extreme innate need for esteem; in the form of status, attention or admiration, a strong need for power, weak self-control, and indifference about the needs and well-being of others."⁵⁸ The obsessive need to be admired impels narcissistic individuals to become strong personalities. People are impressed by their determination and winning drive and are therefore inclined to choose them as leaders. Implicit in the need to be admired is the narcissist inclination to espouse great causes, and this inclination further enhances the ability to impress and lead. However, the dark side is that the leadership is focused on self-aggrandizement and is inherently self-serving. As a result, all means, including manipulation, deceit, and extreme cruelty are considered good and useful to achieve personal enhancement.

In an attempt to distinguish good leadership from narcissism, some political psychologists speak of the difference between personalized and socialized charismatic leaders:

Socialized charismatic leaders use power to serve others, align their vision with the followers' needs and aspirations, maintain open, two-way communication, and rely on moral standards. Personalized charismatic leaders, by contrast, use power for personal gain only, promote their own personal vision, maintain one-way communication, and rely on convenient external moral standards to satisfy self-interests.⁵⁹

Others prefer to oppose narcissistic leaders to "transformational leaders."⁶⁰ As the expression indicates, transformational leaders have the ability to articulate and communicate clear visions that promote common or collective goods; they also develop relationships that tend to empower followers. Different is the case of narcissistic leaders: even though they, too, are able to articulate attractive visions and implement leadership with great confidence, their visions are marred by self-serving purposes, and their relationships with followers are exploitative, more driven by the need to dominate rather than to empower. Though narcissistic leaders are not devoid of charisma, they use their power not to elevate people, but to lower them, thereby aggrandizing themselves and obtaining the adoration they desperately need at the expense of other people.

All what we know about Mengistu perfectly adheres to the essence of the narcissistic leader. Without entering into a detailed analysis (which will be the object of Chapter 14), we can say that the definition of the narcissistic leader by "strong power needs, authoritarianism, self-serving behavior, and exploitation of others and disregard for their rights and feelings" accurately describes Mengistu's most noticeable conducts.⁶¹ Neither his rise nor his fall is quite intelligible outside the resources and the destructive sides of narcissistic traits. He espoused and imposed a totalitarian socialism on the Derg and the country for the self-serving purpose of absolute power. His relationship with followers was both highly manipulative and coercive: he surrounded himself with sycophants, eliminated all those who had different opinions, and demanded absolute obedience through intimidation and terror. In thus debasing everyone, he was able to secure the sense of his own grandeur.

Mengistu's pursuit of grandeur would have remained just a dream did it not encounter the needs of the Derg's members caught in an intractable situation. At first, most members of the Derg were fearful of their future, uncertain about what they wanted, and lacked any clear vision. As members of an *ad hoc* and undecided group, they were looking for a leader able to inspire confidence and articulate a simple vision uniting the group and providing it with a clear sense of mission. They found what they needed in the strong personality of Mengistu: his determination, clarity of vision, and emotional nationalism propelled him to the leadership position, even against rivals who had the advantage of superior education and administrative experiences. Once in the leadership position, Mengistu

used all the weapons of narcissism, from seduction to intimidation and abject cruelty, to eliminate all his rivals and install himself as the absolute leader of the Derg.

Together with Chapter 3, this chapter has established the existence of objective and subjective conditions of social revolution in Ethiopia, namely, a social system of exclusion that created severe forms of elite competition, a millenarian cultural disposition, and a propensity toward cultural sectarianism. We must now proceed to the concrete analysis of these conditions and their various outcomes. The best way to realize such a study is to undertake a thorough diagnosis of Haile Selassie's regime with the view of showing how its inspiring ideology, as well as its structural underpinnings, created the conditions of severe elite conflicts.

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34. Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 225.
35. Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 6.
36. For a thorough discussion of the *Kibre Negast*, see Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization: Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1999).
37. Merid W. Aregay, "Literary Origins of Ethiopian Millenarianism," in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1986), 4: 170.
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The Ideological Origins of Haile Selassie's Regime

What defines Haile Selassie is, above all else, his long and absolute rule over Ethiopia. He single-handedly ruled Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974, with only a brief interruption during the five years of the Italian occupation. Nothing decisive can be said about the Revolution of 1974 outside the conditions created by this long reign. These conditions are, in turn, inseparable from the factors that impacted the genesis of this long reign. These seminal factors had ideological and sociopolitical dimensions. Let us begin with the ideological component.

The Awakening

The path taken by imperial Ethiopia is not comprehensible without the impact of the growing presence and threat of European nations during the scramble for Africa. Though under Emperors Yohannes and Menilik II, Ethiopia had successfully halted the colonial design of European powers, it was clear that the threat was only temporarily removed. Encircled on all sides by colonial powers, Ethiopia inevitably appeared as the next prey of colonial expansion, all the more so as the lack of reforms seemed to block the introduction of even superficial measures of modernization, which alone could have upgraded its defensive ability. Isolated for centuries but nevertheless proud of its independence and Christian civilization, Ethiopia was literally stunned by the discovery of its huge technological gap with the West. European technological abilities, especially in terms of military weapons, became the source of a bitter awakening and critical self-examination.

For those Ethiopians who refrained from interpreting the arrival of Europeans in apocalyptic terms (see Chapter 4), Ethiopia's long independence, hierarchical sociopolitical structure, and Christian heritage made the gap with Eu-

rope even more perplexing. How could sociocultural conditions that were similar in many ways to those of Europe result in such unequal technological abilities? The riddle thickened when Ethiopians remembered that, not long ago, their civilization was at a comparable level with that of Europe. Here is what an Ethiopian poet by the name of Mambaru wrote at the beginning of the last century: noting that "the people of Europe were like us," he asks:

Why do we only not progress one day?
 Why do we see the old passed and forgotten things of a hundred years ago?
 Let us haste, let us push forward.
 Regarding their traces,
 Let us overtake those who have preceded us.¹

The perceived similitude between European nations and Ethiopia prevented the interpretation of the sudden advance of Europeans in terms of racial superiority. Rather, it meant that Europeans awakened to a civilization of science and technology while Ethiopians continued in their medieval hibernation. Some such conception oriented Ethiopians toward an understanding of modernization in terms of "awakening." A good illustration of this understanding is found in a newspaper of the year 1900, characteristically called "the Dawn of Ethiopia."² Using the name of "'Dawn' the honest servant of Ethiopia," the author of the article personified modernization as follows:

The God of Ethiopia be honored and praised! As I having awakened from
 .. their sleep (people) in Europe, Asia, America, Africa and Australia have by
 .. knowledge made them reach the ether (i.e. have highly instructed them) to-day
 also you have brought me to Ethiopia the country which stretches out her hands
 towards God.

Be it noted that this understanding of modernity provides another illustration of the messianic orientation of Ethiopian mentality. The quoted passage identifies modernization as a product of knowledge, but more importantly, as a God-sent event. It has already reached other parts of the world, and the good news, the evangelical announcement is that Ethiopia's turn has come. The biblical reference of Ethiopia stretching her hands to God intimates that the best moment, that is, the mature and less disruptive stage of modernization, is reserved for God's favored nation.

The identification of modernization as God-sent enlightenment protected Ethiopia from any decentering interpretation: not only did the equation of modernization with awakening discard racial connotations, but its depiction in extramundane terms inserted it into Ethiopia's biblical and Christian references. Just as awakening terminates sleep, so too, as awakening, modernization dissipates centuries of ignorance. The condition of ignorance included all nations: Europe as well had to be awakened from a long sleep so that the only difference with Ethiopia and other countries is that it woke up earlier. Additionally, the

'spiritualization of modernization posited Ethiopia as a selected beneficiary, thereby neutralizing the disadvantages associated with an externally induced change. As an expression of divine telos, modernization was thus reconnected with the spirit of the *Kibre Negast* and its depiction of Ethiopia as the favored nation. Unfortunately, a more Westernized, secular interpretation of modernization was soon to replace the early and evangelist version as Ethiopians left the center stage of history under the impact of increasing Westernization of its educated elite.

Conservatives versus Reformists

It must not be made to seem that the entire class of Ethiopian nobility viewed modernization as awakening. As a matter of fact, in the face of colonial powers' total encirclement of Ethiopia and their increasing intrusion into its affairs, the Ethiopian nobility developed two different and antagonistic attitudes. There was the camp of the conservatives who rejected modernizing measures because they regarded them as pernicious and dangerous to Ethiopia. Opposed to conservatives were the reformists who thought that Ethiopians could not remain independent unless they learned from Europe and caught up with its material civilization. The conflict between the two camps intensified after Emperor Menilik suffered an incapacitating stroke in 1906. At first, victory went to the traditionalists when Iyasu, presumed heir to the throne, was deposed and Zewditu, daughter of Menilik, became empress. However, the reformists prevailed when following the death of Zewditu, Teferi, the future Haile Selassie, who was named regent and heir to the throne in 1917, was finally crowned emperor in 1930. This is how Addis Hiwet describes the two opposing camps:

The ultra-traditionalists, who were represented by Zewditu in the diarchy, were opposed to "reforms" (modernization and innovation) preferring the perpetuation of the *status quo*, and were indifferent, reluctant and even opposed to the outlawing of slavery; in foreign policy they represented isolationist trends. The "liberal" or "enlightened" nobility—represented by Teferri—had realized that they as a ruling class could genuinely benefit from full-scale contacts with the outside world. They were clearly aware that the era and the administration and government of the feudal empire had to be established on the foundations of the modern state, which would enable them to rule in a new way.⁴

While the conservatives benefited from the support of the top echelon of the church, the new emperor had the backing of the reformist faction of the nobility and the diplomatic representatives of the colonial powers. He was also supported by the few but vocal Ethiopians who were exposed to European education and had a firsthand look at the enormous gap created by the European material progress. The latter became known as "Japanizers," a term designed to indicate their resolution to modernize Ethiopia by following the example of Japan. To quote Addis, "this enlightened wing of the nobility was supported by what, in the absence of a better term, we have characterized under the rubric Ethiopian

'Japanizers' and the merchant bourgeoisie, exotic and indigenous; and by the diplomatic representatives of Britain, France and Italy."⁵

In light of Europe's colonial advances and the material backwardness of Ethiopia, the few Ethiopians who were able to learn in modern schools started to look for an explanation of how a country that had accomplished great things in the past could fall so massively behind European countries. Not only was Ethiopia a Christian country endowed with a stable state structure crowned by an emperor, but numerous remnants of its past glory also show that it was one of the leading civilized nations in the world. What else could these past accomplishments suggest but the view of Ethiopia as a frozen, arrested civilization? To be so immobilized, a formidable force must have corrupted and blocked the Ethiopian potential. Such a powerful obstacle could emanate from nowhere else but the socioeconomic structure of the country. The main cause of Ethiopia's retardation was so obvious to the Japanizers that they "were unanimous in their condemnation of feudalism as the great single stumbling-block in Ethiopia's progressive development."⁶ The system of land tenure and the resulting severe exploitation of the peasantry together with the attendant values and beliefs inherent in feudalism appeared to them responsible for the Ethiopian stagnation.

The need to liquidate feudalism led the Japanizers to the idea of strengthening the central power. Feudalism cannot be dismantled unless the powerful feudal lords, especially the regional lords, are seriously weakened. Only the rise of a strong central state headed by a modernizing monarch can weaken the feudal nobles and demolish feudalism. As one reformist, Bilata Gabra Igziabher, writes:

Let us stay strong; so that we may be wise
If by science and learning we strengthen the throne
As the Emperor and Bishop have told us.⁷

We find the ideological origins of Haile Selassie's autocracy in this theory of modernization making the strengthening of the central state to the detriment of regional lords into the *sine qua non* of Ethiopia's entry into the modern world. One important factor in the origination of the theory was the cultural shock caused by Ethiopia's technological lag *vis-à-vis* European countries. The more modern educated Ethiopians spread the view that Ethiopia lagged behind Europe because of its conservative church and nobility, the stronger the call for a centralizing monarch became. And the more backwardness defined Ethiopia, the greater was the need to aggrandize the centralizing monarch with the additional role of enlightener of the people. Haile Selassie appealingly responded to this call and became the champion of the pre-war intellectuals, whom he used until he achieved autocracy.

Haile Selassie himself defended autocratic rule as an imperative of modernization. In a speech he made in 1931, he attributes backwardness to the isolation of the Ethiopian people from the modern world. He draws the conclusion that, just "as a good father guides his children," a modernizing emperor must become

the tutor of his people.⁸ Noticeably, the speech affiliates with the civilizing mission of colonialism: modernization requires an authoritarian and tutelary government because the natives (Ethiopians), being backward, are unable to progress by themselves. Just as fathers restrict the freedom of their children until they grow up, Ethiopians need a tutelary government that reduces freedom and rights until they assimilate modern ideas and methods of working.

Haile Selassie's definition of himself as enlightener soon failed to keep pace with the evolution of the Ethiopian society. What seemed feasible for the pre-war generation of intellectuals and those in the 1950s became increasingly questionable to the better educated generation that appeared on the political scene in the 1960s. For this generation, far from being a modernizer, Haile Selassie became the embodiment and the guardian of the status quo, and as such, the main obstacle to modernization. As will be clear in the following chapters, Haile Selassie never succeeded in providing his rule with a justification other than that of a traditional monarch upholding enlightenment and centralization. In particular, he did not attempt to formulate a nationalist ideology with a clearly spelled out economic and social agenda.

I see no better way to clearly bring out the ideological origins of Haile Selassie's autocratic rule than to appeal to the two most important pre-war intellectuals, namely, Afework Gebre Yesus and Gebrehiwet Baykedagn. For both of them, the backwardness of Ethiopia required nothing less than a tutelary government headed by an enlightened monarch. Tekeste Negash sets out the ideological atmosphere of the time when he writes:

The view that Ethiopia, once a great and powerful nation, had stagnated due to conservatism and resistance to change, had gained ground by the 1920s. Ethiopian contemporary authors such as Gebrehiwet Baykedagn, Blatta Gebregziabeker Gila Mariam, Afework Gebreyesus, and Aleqa Taye Gebre Mariam had repeatedly point out the backwardness of Ethiopia.⁹

The study of these two intellectuals is interesting not only to lay the ideological foundation of Haile Selassie's regime, but also to show how their disappointments over the slow pace of reforms presage the revolutionary course of the 1970s. We begin with Afework.

Afework and the West

What most defines Afework is his fascination with European technological power. The fascination particularly transpires in his book, *Guide du Voyageur en Abyssinie*, which was translated into French and published in Rome in 1908. The book relates the conversation that a rich European merchant had with his Ethiopian guide, who was taking him from the seaport to the interior of the country. The intention of the merchant was to sell European goods and return to his country with exotic products.

The Ethiopian guide is very critical of Ethiopian society and has high admiration for Europeans. In one of their conversations, he says, "you Europeans,

you are like gods on earth; I don't think there is anything that can oppose your will."¹⁰ Though he is also very proud of Ethiopia's past glorious history, he is deeply upset that his country now lags so far behind Western countries. For him, the lag clearly indicates that the progress of Ethiopian civilization has been interrupted at some point. The importance of the notion of interruption is obvious from the start since the book begins with a call for Ethiopia to "wake up" so as to resume "its march toward civilization, which was arrested almost at the beginning of its birth for many centuries."¹¹

Why was Ethiopian civilization interrupted? What prevented it from moving forward? For Afework, the major impediment to the progress of society has been the predominance of the warrior class and its warlike values. Its major consequences were the absence of social peace and stability, the mistreatment of the working people, and the disdain of intellectual works. As the Ethiopian guide puts it,

The authorities of this country eat, drink, sleep and fatten themselves up like Easter sheep, and that at the expense of the property of the poor people, who are continuously and mercilessly robbed by them. These are, sir, the good occupations of our brave authorities.¹²

A little further he adds: "I don't think that a people as badly governed as the Ethiopian people exists."¹³

Why didn't kings prevent lords and governors of provinces from committing these flagrant injustices? The answer of the guide is that regional lords "are not to be blamed entirely, since they are but imitating what kings themselves are doing."¹⁴ Because of the pernicious behaviors of kings and governors, a rich and beautiful country is destitute and unable to progress. It should be noted that the guide sees one happy exception, to wit, Emperor Menilik. Unlike all his predecessors, Menilik was a liberal and modernizing monarch who "made great efforts to push his country into the path of progress," despite the stubborn resistance of the nobility and the people.¹⁵

One explanation for Menilik's exceptional behavior was that, unlike his predecessors, he was a legitimate king. Indeed, "for almost 450 years, there had not been a legitimate king, except the present Emperor Menilik."¹⁶ Here Afework touches on what is, according to him, the main reason for the lack of progress, namely, the absence of a hereditary monarchy in Ethiopia. The absence of hereditary transmission of power deprived Ethiopia of political stability by preventing an orderly transition each time a king passed away. More importantly, it led to the enthronement of usurpers who used terror and plunder to stay in power, the only way by which they could silence their opponents and reward their followers and soldiers at the expense of ordinary people. According to Afework, the devastations that accompanied the rise of Tewodros and Yohannes furnish a good illustration of the destructive conflicts and extensive plunders befalling the country each time usurpers unleash a power struggle.

Since illegitimate kings and warlordism explain Ethiopia's backwardness and misery, the basic condition for the return of social peace and justice is none other than the restoration of hereditary monarchy. With the restoration of legitimacy, Ethiopia will easily resume the path of progress that it started in the past. The first task of the legitimate monarch will be to ban warlordism and curtail the power of regional lords by reinforcing the authority of the central government. A vigorous attempt to enlighten the people and drag them out of centuries of ignorance and barbaric beliefs and practices must accompany the centralization effort. Such a monarch must go beyond Menilik and directly abolish feudalism, for "so long as the feudal regime will exist in the Ethiopian empire, neither equality nor freedom will ever reign."¹⁷

It springs to mind that both the explanation for the Ethiopian stagnation and the suggested solution did no more than shore up Haile Selassie's march toward autocracy. In effect, the Constitution of 1931 declared that only the descendants of Haile Selassie had the right to succeed to the throne. The provision angered many important regional lords, who were thus forced into confrontations that further tightened Haile Selassie's grip on power. Although the Constitution established the first Parliament in Ethiopia, its members were directly nominated by the emperor himself and had no other function than to rubberstamp his decisions. With the decline of regional powers and the creation of a docile Parliament, the conditions leading to the establishment of autocracy were fully in place.

The justification for this huge concentration of power was none other than modernization and the urgent need to catch up with the West. Clearly, Afe-work's analyses of the Ethiopian predicament implicitly sanctioned imperial autocracy as the essential requisite for modernization. In a situation of utter backwardness and barbarism, only the absolute power of an enlightened monarch can strike out toward the arduous path of modernization. It is equally undeniable that the internalization of the colonial description of the European as superior and civilized and the non-European as inferior and uncivilized inspired Afe-work's dreadful portrayal of Ethiopia. In agreement with the colonial discourse, he does not hesitate to write that Ethiopia is "a country whose people are yet primitive."¹⁸

It should not come as a surprise if, seeing the slow pace of modernization and, most of all, the use of absolute power for personal aggrandizement, Afe-work became frustrated. So great was his disappointment that he directly appealed to European powers to colonize Ethiopia and do what the Ethiopian leadership refuses to do. His collaboration with the Italians during the occupation brought him disgrace and life imprisonment. Even though his treason is unforgivable, it should be seen more as a consequence of fierce disillusionment and desperation than as a real allegiance to Italy. The only rational explanation for Afe-work's behavior was his belief that colonial rule would greatly benefit Ethiopia, especially by removing the parasitic feudal class and its primitive beliefs and customs. Alessandro Lessona, the then under-secretary at the Italian Ministry of Colonies, said the following: "He [Afe-work] believes in our policy of pac-

ification. Above all, he believes in our kind of civilization. He thinks that only Italy can redeem his country."¹⁹ What is more, Afework interpreted the prosperity of America after British colonial rule as a vindication of his position. This is what he said to an Italian official:

No doubt you are surprised by what I have done and you must have lost all respect for me. But I did what I did because I believed that if Italy took over Ethiopia, civilized it and made it prosperous, the day will then come when the Ethiopians, having become civilized, strong and prosperous, will free themselves from Italy, just as the United States did with England.²⁰

What sustains Afework's faith in the revival of Ethiopia is none other than Ethiopian messianism, which he perfectly incarnated. In the book he devoted to Menilik, he speaks of him as a God-sent emperor. He writes: "God chose Menilik II and told him: go, Ethiopia is mistreated; Ethiopians are in tears as a result of too much ignorance. Go and give Ethiopia hope. . . . So that in Ethiopia darkness gives way to light . . . teach, guide, and protect the Ethiopian people."²¹ Both the content and writing style reveal a messianic belief in a savior sent by God's providence to end suffering and ignorance. Afework's treason must be viewed from this background of messianic expectation. Disappointed by the lack of progress and the stubborn resistance of the nobility and church, his messianic spirit drove him to construe the Italian conquest as a necessary agency that God had to use to free Ethiopia from all the hurdles of feudalism. Once feudalism is shattered thanks to colonial intrusion, Ethiopia will rise up again and resume its march toward its divine destiny.

There is no doubt that Afework is the first and most tragic victim of Eurocentric discourse and indoctrination. That is why he could not see any positive value in the institutional and cultural legacies of traditional Ethiopia. For him, their dissimilarities from European institutions and culture denoted, not their difference, but their archaic and harmful nature. Having endorsed the unilinear conception of historical development and with it the idea that Europe represented the model of civilization and the driving force of history, he could not visualize modernization in any other fashion than through the imitation and adoption of European characteristics. As extirpation from entrenched barbarism and ignorance, modernization required nothing less than the means of colonial domination.

Gebrehiwot and Modernization

The endorsement of the same premises of historical development will land Gebrehiwot on similar conclusions. His recurrent theme is simple and obvious: Ethiopia cannot remain independent unless it modernizes rapidly. What is less obvious, however, is that for him modernization entails a complete, unqualified Westernization. He writes:

Ignorance has held sway. Today, however, a strong and unassailable enemy called the European mind has risen against her [Ethiopia]. Whoever opens his door to her [i.e. European mind] prospers; whoever closes his door will be destroyed. If our Ethiopia accepts European mind, no one would dare to attack her; if not, she will disintegrate and be enslaved.²²

His goal is not the synchronization of Western values with the inherited identity of a given people, which synchronization would require some filtering and adjustment so as to avoid complete deracination, but the unreserved opening of the traditional mind to Western civilization.

The explanation for the defense of a wholehearted Westernization lies in Gebrehiwot's equation of Western civilization with universality. Fully endorsing the Eurocentric interpretation of the conquest of nature as a goal of human existence, he writes: "Man was first subservient to nature. He lived by receiving the gift from nature. . . . As time went on, however, he became the master of nature."²³ European technological development is thus not an expression of a cultural idiosyncrasy, but a realization of human potential, regardless of cultural and racial particularities. In addition to assuming that the same desire to conquer nature and produce wealth so as to achieve happiness propels all cultures, Gebrehiwot, again fully supporting the Eurocentric view of history, believes that the goal is achieved not at once, but through a step-by-step progression. To quote him, "if we follow the research of European scholars, humanity attained its present level of understanding and wealth not at once but in stages proceeding from one to the other."²⁴

This approach construes the technological disparity between Europe and non-European countries as an indication of different stages in the realization of a universal history. Since human beings follow the same goal of the mastery of nature, it is fully justified to say with G. W. F. Hegel that the variety of human cultures expresses nothing less than "*graduation* in the development" of spirit.²⁵ The culture that shows the highest degree of mastery of nature becomes, accordingly, the leading culture and the driving force of history. Those cultures that exhibit reduced abilities to control nature must be defined as backward, that is, as being at retarded stages of growth.

One perplexing question arises: if the technological control of nature is inherent in all cultures, how comes it that only Europe was able to fully engage in the path of the conquest of nature? Gebrehiwot rejects outright racial or environmental explanations; instead, he directs our attention to the presence of hindrances that blocked the advancement of non-Western countries. He identifies the main blockage as being the prolonged absence of social peace. "More than the impediment to progress posed by soil and the climate, there is another one which is an even greater obstacle, and that is banditry and war,"²⁶ he writes. What else could enduringly halt the progress of knowledge and productive capacity but the protracted absence of social peace? In addition to instituting instability, continuous conflicts and wars generate ruling elites that are inimical to knowledge and productive activities for the simple reason that they live off plunder and violence. Nothing is more opposed to the development of

knowledge and technological advancement than the goal and values of war. So that, "wars are the principal cause of the difference in the level of knowledge and wealth of people in this world. . . . The real aim and the conclusion of war are looting and subjugation."²⁷

Fully agreeing with Afework, Gebrehiwot proposes Ethiopia as a perfect example of progress blocked by the lack of social peace. Through a short review of Ethiopian history, he shows how a history replete with wars and pillages thwarted the great potential of the Aksumite civilization. Religious conflicts, political rivalries, and foreign invasions caused these uninterrupted wars, and their main outcomes were the rise of powerful warlords and the weakening of the imperial institution. How otherwise could one explain that the great potential that Ethiopia had demonstrated in the past declined and deteriorated instead of developing? Indeed,

the obelisks testify that at the time they were erected, the Ethiopian people had attained prosperity and power. If they [the Axumites cum Ethiopians] were not hampered by obstacles [i.e. wars], in between, the period and extent of prosperity would have been longer and greater. *Thus the main obstacle to knowledge and wealth is war.*²⁸

According to Gebrehiwot, most detrimental was that the interruption of progress created conditions that favored the accumulation of bad habits and beliefs. Not only did continuous conflicts and wars ruin the country economically and weaken central or imperial institutions, but they also encouraged regional warlords to live off pillage and destruction in their constant conflict for each other's territories. In other words, besides weakening the imperial institution, the rise of warlordism empowered rival regional powers and caused a culture change valuing war at the expense of peace, productive activity, and intellectual research. The period known as "the Era of the Princes," which brought about the breakdown of the central government from 1769 to 1855, represented the apex of warlordism. As a result of the collapse of the central state,

the many *shifitas* at the time of the Gonderine kings refused to submit to the kings, completely destroying the unity of Ethiopia. Among these *shifitas*, Mickael of Tigray killed the Emperor of Gonder. Following this, autonomous chiefs arose from Tigray, northern Gojjam, Wallo, Bagemder and Shoa. These fought among themselves wanting to take the territory of the other.²⁹

The unity of the country was reestablished thanks to the rise of Emperor Tewodros, who "defeated all the local warlords and brought back unity to the people of Ethiopia."³⁰ Unfortunately, so rampant had banditry become that Tewodros did not have enough time to fully pacify the country. What is more, having encircled Ethiopia from all angles, new and more powerful invaders, namely, the colonial powers began to encroach upon its territory with the clear intent of preparing the ground for a full-scale colonization. Since one way of facilitat-

ing their conquest of Ethiopia was to create divisions among the various chiefs, "these foreign enemies sowed the seeds of chaos."³¹

After a new wave of wars and conflicts between internal rivals and against external invaders, peace was finally restored when Menilik, who had already significantly expanded the empire by incorporating what is today the southern part of the country, defeated the Italians at Adwa in 1896. However, Gebrehiwot does not share the admiration that Afework had for Menilik. Though Menilik expanded the empire and established peace, he did not pursue a vigorous policy of modernization. First, the new expanded empire remains fragile because force rather than a wise policy of integration holds it together. If the newly conquered peoples appear pacified, it is more because they fear Menilik than because of "the solidity of our institutions."³² Secondly, Menilik did not introduce the institutional changes favoring modernization; he was more of a conqueror than a reformer. In particular, he did not want to antagonize the traditional nobility by imposing reforms detrimental to its interests. Instead, he was content with "transmitting the traditions of his fathers to the people; he did not try to make them accept anything new."³³

Menilik's deficiencies paved the way for Haile Selassie's rise, who, in addition to strengthening the central power, showed a modernizing will manifestly surpassing that of his illustrious predecessor. Summarizing Gebrehiwot's political itinerary, Bahru Zewde writes: "disappointed by Menilek as a modernizing monarch . . . Gabra-Hewot had no choice but to shift his hopes and his allegiance to . . . Tafari Makonnen, the future Hayla-Sellase."³⁴ This shift of allegiance coincided with the autocratic ambition of Haile Selassie. Gebrehiwot's analysis of Ethiopian impediments established the necessity of a strong government to unite the country. Such a government would put an end to regional forces and establish the conditions of economic development by protecting the producing people against the rapacity of warlords. Since his solution posited the strengthening of the imperial institution to the detriment of the regional forces as a basic precondition of modernization, Haile Selassie could only view sympathetically both the diagnosis and the suggested solution. Not that Gebrehiwot had in mind the same thing as Haile Selassie, but because his analysis of Ethiopian retardation as well as his remedy could be easily interpreted as a call for imperial absolutism. Haile Selassie read into Gebrehiwot's push for the adoption of Western institutions the imperative of centralization and autocratic rule.

That Haile Selassie saw in the discourses of Gebrehiwot and other intellectuals a justification for his autocracy is best shown by his full endorsement of their diagnosis of Ethiopia's retardation. For him, too, though Ethiopia had achieved great things in the past, it has fallen into a marginal existence because of lack of social peace. In one of his speeches, he alluded to its lethargic existence by referring to Ethiopia as a "Sleeping Beauty" that "is beginning to awaken from her sleep."³⁵ In another speech, he goes further and, like the intellectuals, he blames Ethiopia's culture and history for the lack of progress:

Although the greatness of Ethiopia and the history of all her achievements may be found fully recorded in the books of many learned men, I constantly revert in my speeches to this theme of her past history, to show how the dissensions that arose within the country in former times pulled her back and prevented her regular breathing.³⁶

Clearly, backwardness is attributed to regionalism and feudal rivalries. Though regionalism was a system of decentralized power allowing autonomy and self-government to regions and protecting their right to compete for the imperial throne, whose consequence was, among other things, the prevention of ethnized opposition, Haile Selassie ostracized regional power instead of modernizing it.

The criticism of regionalism was no doubt a shrewd way of justifying the need for autocratic rule. In light of regionalism being a long-established and cherished practice, no better way existed to discredit it than to make it the single culprit of Ethiopia's backwardness. Moreover, a vigorous ideological campaign against the traditional system was necessary to substantiate autocracy, given its hostility with Ethiopian values and customs. This is to say that the ideological support of intellectuals like Gebrehiwot and Afework was very helpful for the rise of Haile Selassie. As Bahru says, he "found the intellectuals as useful ally in his struggle against the force of tradition represented by Empress Zäwditu and the other conservative stalwarts of the establishment."³⁷

"Japanizer" as a Misnomer

Since imperial autocracy was the unintended but, alas, the sole tangible contribution of the first intellectuals, it must be admitted that the term "Japanizer" is anything but a correct qualification. Unlike their Japanese counterparts, Ethiopian intellectuals had already developed an iconoclastic view concerning Ethiopian traditional values and institutions. Japan opened to the West for technology while preserving its social philosophy, as illustrated by the Meiji Restoration and the revival of the myth of the divine emperor. Very different was the attitude of Ethiopian intellectuals, who advocated a full-blown and uncritical Westernization. Afework's endorsement of the colonial design of the Italians in the hope that it would help civilize Ethiopia is a tragic illustration of the danger of Westernization.

Because their iconoclastic attitude isolated the early intellectuals, they could not enlist the support of the church and other influential persons in their appeal for rapid modernization. Had they pleaded for technology while defending the preservation of the social philosophy, many influential nobles and churchmen would have certainly espoused the cause of modernization. The involvement of some members of the traditional elite, however small it may have been, would have, in turn, blocked the institutionalization of an autocratic rule. Instead, the intellectuals' unreserved admiration for the West and their negative views of the

traditional society presented them to most nobles and especially to the powerful Ethiopian church as suspicious and alienated persons.

Nothing could better show the difference between Ethiopian and Japanese intellectuals than their respective conceptions of Europeans. The Ethiopian intellectuals considered Europeans as highly civilized and Europe's social and cultural features as the sole model to follow to get out of backwardness. As we saw, neither Afework nor Gebrehiwot had anything positive to say about Ethiopian history and values, except when they refer to ancient Ethiopia. Moreover, in perceiving Ethiopia as an arrested civilization, they cornered themselves into endorsing the Eurocentric vision of human development. Because they assigned the same goal to Ethiopian and European civilizations, namely, the technological mastery of nature, they had no other choice than to put the blame for Ethiopia's retardation on its traditions and history. Nowhere do we see them claim that Ethiopians had different goals than Europeans so that the usage of Western criteria to define the achievements of Ethiopia is a flawed approach. Only the rejection of Eurocentrism could have shown them that the institutions and the regional competitions that they so severely criticized explain in large measure the protracted survival of Ethiopia's political independence and cultural identity in an extremely hostile environment.³⁸

Contrary to Ethiopians, most Japanese intellectuals considered Europeans barbarians. Moreover, they have agonized over the issue of how to counter the iconoclastic ideas that young Japanese were bound to develop as a result of internalizing the main outcome of Western education, namely, the superiority of the West. The view of Westerners as barbarians was so widespread that a scholar like Yoshida Shoin had "to popularize the idea that foreigners were barbarians only in regard to their ethical and moral values, not in their science and technology. He argued that for Japan to defeat these barbarians it must adopt Western industrial and military technology."³⁹ The rejection of Western superiority protected Japanese from being overwhelmed by the West: the confinement of Western contribution to science and technology and the attribution of the top rank to Japan in matters of ethical and human development dismissed the notion of the West as the sole carrier of progress. Some such approach countered the colonial discourse, and with it, the development of an inferiority complex among Japanese.

Various testimonies indicate that a similar view existed in Ethiopia during the scramble for Africa. However, it was progressively diminished to the point of extinction, especially after Britain rescued Ethiopia from the Italian colonization. In conjunction with the West ceasing to appear as a threat, Ethiopians yielded more and more to the idea of backwardness. And as an increasing number of Ethiopians became exposed to Western education, the tendency to endorse the Western view of history prevailed together with the vulnerability to mental colonization. One basic consequence of mental colonization was the inability to define modernization and economic development in terms of a combative nationalist ideology. Because the view prevailing among the ruling elite interpreted the West as an ally, Ethiopian nationalism had no actual purpose. It

existed to the extent that it referred to a glorious history of independence, but it was more of a memory than a current attitude. Ethiopia's condition was that of a tutee, a student painfully learning the Western ways.

Different was the Japanese attitude toward the West: it was still about learning, not from a master, but from an adversary, an enemy which, though inferior in the refinements of civilization, happened to possess powerful material means. The sense of dealing with an ill-bred but formidable adversary enabled Japanese to coin modernization in terms of a nationalist ideology. Contrary to Ethiopians, nationalism was not for them mere inheritance; it was also a living attitude.

The one Ethiopian who attempted an approach similar to Japan was a more recent author. I have in mind Kebede Mikael, who unfortunately did not have any impact as both autocracy and the alienation of Ethiopians were already in full swing, not to mention his own reluctance to displease Haile Selassie. Nonetheless, Kebede counters the colonial discourse about the superiority of the West by arguing that the latter developed the material side of civilization while Ethiopia is superior in matters involving the spiritual side of civilization. To quote him:

As for the Ethiopian people, granted that they have less progressed in material civilization, they keep abreast of the others and maybe are ahead of all of them when it comes to moral civilization. They excel in those fine qualities which are to be found only in the noble society of the Homeric times.⁴⁰

Kebede bases his arguments on the belief that, in terms of moral values, the ancients were superior to the modern. What properly defines the modern world is less moral betterment than the progress of material power.

To say that moral excellence defines the pre-modern mentality is to argue that Ethiopia, an old Christian country, cannot be classified as backward. True, Ethiopia is not as developed as the West materially, but this deficiency must be viewed against the background of moral superiority derived from its long commitment to Christian values. Moreover, the moral asset warrants that Ethiopia's modernization will be of the finest quality. In Kebede's words,

We must, all of us Ethiopians, rejoice to see modernization penetrate into Ethiopia, thanks to our Emperor. It is incontestable that Ethiopia, whose history is glorious in all aspects, will become a great nation when she will have acquired this form of civilization which is not yet characteristic of her.⁴¹

Kebede faces the problem of knowing why Ethiopia, which was so advanced morally, lagged behind in terms of material progress. According to him, isolation is the main reason for Ethiopia's lack of material progress, and not Ethiopian institutions and values. Because of the extensive Muslim conquest and encirclement, the country lost contact with the main centers of civilization and remained surrounded for centuries by little advanced societies. Notably, the loss

of seaport was the major impediment that brought about the complete isolation of the country. He writes:

Two main obstacles, one in the past and the other at the present time, have handicapped and still handicap Ethiopia's progress and modernization. One obstacle was, in the past, the complete absence of neighboring countries from where she could contact Western civilization. The other, at the present time, is the persistent refusal she encounters every time she tries to get an access to the sea, which would let her breathe with the rest of the world.⁴²

Kebede's arguments are certainly shaky, to say the least. It is very difficult to agree with the idea portraying the ancient world as morally superior to the modern world. No less dubious is the explanation of Ethiopian retardation by isolation, since facts attest that Ethiopians deliberately rejected contacts with Europeans countries on several occasions, as evidenced by the expulsion of the Jesuit expedition in 1634. Even so, we should praise Kebede's attempt to dismiss the colonial depiction of Ethiopia as a backward country in dire need of Westernization. The dismissal excluded moral and spiritual borrowings from the West; it confined modernization to material progress, to which Ethiopia was indeed foreign. Hence modernization cannot be simply Westernization, since many aspects of the past are valuable and deserve to be preserved and even strengthened. Ethiopians should learn technology from the West, and not how to become civilized.

To sum up, among the first intellectuals, the most important authors do not deserve the qualification of "Japanizer." Their readings of Ethiopian history and culture as well as their explanation of Ethiopia's technological lag were so impregnated with Eurocentric concepts that they were unfit for the framing of a nationalist discourse and a national course of economic development. Instead, they laid the ground for the rise of Haile Selassie's autocracy. This does not mean that intellectual derailment alone explains the establishment of autocracy. Political and social factors were also active in the genesis of imperial autocracy, as shown in the next chapter.

Notes

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2. Eadie, *An Amharic Reader*, 98.
3. Eadie, *An Amharic Reader*, 99.
4. Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), 62.
5. Addis, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, 62.
6. Addis, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, 70.
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8. Teschome G. Wagaw, *Education in Ethiopia: Prospect and Retrospect* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979), 138.

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10. G. J. Afevork, *Guide du Voyageur en Abyssinie* (Rome: Imprimerie C. De Luigi, 1908), 99 (my translation). I have translated all the quotations from this book.
11. Afevork, *Guide du Voyageur en Abyssinie*, 19.
12. Afevork, *Guide du Voyageur en Abyssinie*, 182.
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19. Quoted in Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 56.
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23. Gabrahiwot Baykadagn, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, trans. Tenkir Bongor (London: Kamak House, 1995), 68.
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25. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), 56.
26. Gabrahiwot, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, 71.
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28. Gabrahiwot, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, 76.
29. Gabrahiwot, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, 78.
30. Gabrahiwot, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, 78.
31. Gabrahiwot, *State & Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia*, 79.
32. Guebrè-Heywèt Baykedagne, *L'Empereur Menelik & l'Ethiopie* (Addis-Abeba/Paris: Maison des Etudes Ethiopiennes/ Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 1993), 9 (my translation).
33. Guebrè-Heywèt, *L'Empereur Menelik & l'Ethiopie*, 12 (my translation).
34. Bahru, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, 52.
35. Paulos Milkias, "The Political Spectrum of Western Education in Ethiopia," *Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 1 (1982), 26.
36. Quoted in Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*, 2–3.
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38. For more on this issue, see Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization Ethiopia's—Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1999).
39. Ellen Kay Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1978), 85.
40. Kebede Mikael, *Ethiopia and Western Civilization*, trans. Marcel Hassid (1949), n. p., 97.
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Sociopolitical Origins of Haile Selassie's Regime

The last chapter has established how the threat of colonization inspired a reformist movement. Even if Haile Selassie's autocratic design hijacked the movement, there is no denying that the need to counter the threat of colonization was the essential motive for Ethiopia's engagement into the path of modernization. The movement was derailed because the internal situation was not very conducive to modernization. This initial ill-equipment accounts for the rise of Haile Selassie.

The Showan Hegemony

A major defining feature of Ethiopia's modern state is that it came into being as a necessary means to oppose colonialism; it was not, as was the case in most colonized countries, the handiwork of colonialism. As Dessalegn Rahmeto notes, "the forging of the machinery of state was accomplished not through imperialism, which was threatening the country at the early period of the rise of Emperor Haile Selassie, but rather against it."¹ Centralizing policy had already started with Tewodros who, in the face of the ravages and anarchy caused by the Era of the Princes, believed that the appropriate response to colonial threat was the establishment of a strong central government. Disunity and regional rivalries had weakened Ethiopia's ability to resist colonial incursions. Moreover, the traditional system could not repulse such a powerful threat: not only was a modern army necessary, but also new resources had to be found to equip the army and set up a modern administration.

Tewodros did not have time to put in action his modernizing goal. Neither did his successor, Yohannes, who was busy pushing back repeated external incursions. In any case, after the extensive conflicts and ravages of the Era of the Princes, northern regional lords were too weak and too resentful toward each

other for any one of them to emerge as the undisputed leader and impose central authority. Such was not the case, however, of Showa and its nobility.

Unlike the divided and ravaged northern regions, Showa had become very powerful under Menilik. If any regional lord were to emerge to impose the idea of a strong central government and become the agent of modernization, such a leader would come from nowhere else but Showa. The secret of the power of Showa was the policy of the southern expansion, which considerably increased both its material and human resources. By conquering and incorporating the people and resources of what is today the southern part of Ethiopia, Showa and its nobility had gathered a power that northern regional lords could not withstand even if they were united. This powerful surge of Showa and its nobility announced the gathering, for the first time since quite long, of conditions propitious to a centralized government. To quote Rene Lefort,

The economic and political decline of the north became more marked, while the modernization of its southern part went ahead and the leading position of the Shoan nobility was entrenched. In this way, Menelik's conquest of the south moved the Empire's centre of gravity southwards.²

The first intellectuals' call for a centralized strong government would have been no more than a wishful thinking without the conditions created by the Showan rise.

Let us clearly establish that the policy of the southern expansion was itself a response to the colonial threat. In light of the growing encirclement, notably after the successive colonization of neighboring countries and tribal communities, it became quite obvious to the Ethiopian ruling class that, unless unity was restored around the throne, Ethiopia was bound to be the next target of the scramble. Alluding to the vivid awareness of the colonial danger, Addis writes:

nineteenth century Ethiopia feudal warlords in particular were fully alive to the deep social-economic chasm separating Europe and Ethiopia. And it was also in the 19th century that the old *cri de coeur* of Ethiopian warlords—Arms and Artisans—was raised to its fullest pitch.³

So patent was the danger that various northern regional lords found themselves competing for the control of land not yet taken by colonial forces, that is, the southern part of today's Ethiopia. A pertinent illustration of the deep rivalry existing between Gojami, Tigrean, and Showan feudal lords for the conquest of the south is "the battle of Embabo," which was a "battle between the Gojamis and the Shewan feudal armies in the scramble for Oromo territories."⁴ Whoever controls the south not only emerges as the leader capable of uniting the country, but also as the one with enough resources to purchase the much needed firearms to stop the colonial advance. The victory of Adwa fully vindicated the validity of this defensive strategy.

For a number of obvious reasons, Showa was better placed to conquer the south than the northern regions. As already indicated, prolonged regional conflicts and intra-regional noble rivalries had weakened northern lords. Moreover, unlike Showa, geographical position was putting northern regions in the first line of colonial assaults. By contrast, Showa was more unified and peaceful while also being further removed from direct colonial attacks. More importantly, the long policy of assimilation with neighboring Oromo populations and leaders, the most famous instance being the partnership between Menilik and Ras Gobena, had already expanded Showa's human and material resources. The Oromo participation in the conquest of the south was so sizeable that Richard Greenfield speaks of "the Shewan Galla Confederation."⁵ Last but not least, the myth of Menilik as God-sent savior of Ethiopia had galvanized the Showan church and population.

Supported by an expanded and rich territory, Menilik became powerful with the result that "like the south, the north came under the tutelage of the Shoan aristocracy."⁶ Menilik's authority and control over the north and the south reached an all-time high when he defeated the Italians at Adwa. Neither Tewodros nor Yohannes was successful in restoring the authority of the emperor despite numerous victories because both were too weakened to establish a lasting victory. The situation was different with the rise of Showa. Thanks to the southern expansion, Showa had become a powerful center that regional lords could not successfully oppose. This Showan hegemony so marginalized regional powers that it created the conditions favorable for the emergence of a strong and centralized government. The rise of a strong government, originally conceived to counter the colonial threat, has thus its origin in the ascendancy of Showa, itself made possible by the southern expansion. Thanks to the support of Showa, his regional base, Haile Selassie intensified centralization during his long reign to the point that the state developed the features of a full-blown imperial autocracy. This negative evolution provides the defining attribute of Haile Selassie's regime.

External Intervention

Before discussing the internal reasons that supported the move toward autocracy, it is essential that we keep in mind that the process would not have been successful without the intervention of European powers. Not that European powers initiated the process, but because their support to Haile Selassie further enlarged the imbalance already created in his favor by the Showan hegemony. In other words, foreign support was instrumental in bringing about the complete subordination of the nobility to Haile Selassie's autocratic design. While it is wise to agree with Dessalegn that Ethiopia's modern state resulted from the need to counter imperialist threats, it is also undeniable that imperialist powers have had their share in its formation.

Without the support first of British and later of American governments, Haile Selassie would have had great difficulty in building the repressive power

and the bureaucratic apparatus that he so badly needed to subdue regional lords. Also, let us not forget that the British intervention was crucial not only for the liberation of Ethiopia from the Italian occupation, but also for the reinstatement of Haile Selassie to his throne. Who knows what would have happened if the British had supported the patriots instead of helping Haile Selassie regain his throne? Likewise, the British military support has been necessary to defeat the 1943 serious rebellion in Tigray. In the mid-1950s, the United States replaced Britain as the main Western ally of Ethiopia. This alliance, especially its military component, has been critical in building the military force of Haile Selassie's regime.

Given the mediocre economic performance of the regime, it is naïve to assume that Haile Selassie's project of centralization would have succeeded without Western governments' financial, military, and diplomatic support. The support created a state of disequilibrium such that a local statesman soared above indigenous forces and became unaccountable to them. The important role of external assistance in the genesis of modern autocratic governments is not hard to establish, since examples abound of autocratic states that collapsed when their external sponsors ceased to support them. When external backing fails, the autocratic state, made autonomous through the care of foreign interests, returns to the normal situation of accountability to indigenous classes.

As to the question why Western powers decided to support specifically Haile Selassie, the most plausible answer is that, from all his rivals, they found him to be most accommodating to their interests, all the more so as his early commitment to modernization gave him the reputation of being a trustworthy follower of the West. For his part, Haile Selassie welcomed the support because it backed his autocratic project materially, of course, but also ideologically. When European powers praised his statesmanship and his commitment to modernize the country, they certainly gave a boost to his internal stature.

Haile Selassie's autocratic scheme benefited even when colonial powers wanted to unseat him. Such was notably the case with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Whatever serious damages Ethiopians suffered, there is no doubt that the Italian occupation directly benefited Haile Selassie. It

facilitated the consolidation of power by creating a vacuum which the emperor used after the liberation to establish a central army, abolish regional armies, create a new tax system under the Ministry of Finance, and reorganize provincial administration through the Ministry of Interior.⁷

Without doubt, the occupation seriously disrupted the traditional power-base of the nobility; it also caused many deaths among those nobles who took up arms and fought against the Italians. The most stubborn resistance to Haile Selassie's centralizing policy would have certainly come from such patriotic nobles.

The Southern Land System

Granted that the southern expansion saved Ethiopia from colonization, it also created the huge problem of assimilation of the southern peoples who, on top of being numerically considerable, were also culturally different from the north. Gebrehiwot Baykedagn already considered the fragility of the empire as a major problem. According to him, the new conquered peoples appeared pacified less because they were integrated than because they feared violent repressions. Bahru Zewde cites another author, Tedla Haile, who expressed his deep concern over the future of the empire in the M. A. thesis he wrote in Belgium in 1930. Titled "*Pourquoi et comment pratiquer une politique d'assimilation en Ethiopie*," the thesis "can be considered as the first serious attempt to address the issue of national integration in Ethiopia, albeit from an unabashedly chauvinistic standpoint. The central theme of the thesis is the need for the assimilation of the Oromo."⁸

In the face of this huge problem of assimilation, the Showan nobility reached the conclusion that the empire and, consequently, its hegemony and economic interest, cannot be maintained without a strong centralized state. Instead of developing the old system of integration through the *gult* system (I will shortly discuss the notion), it progressively adopted the practice of land dispossession. As a result, southern peasants lost all their customary rights and became tenants on the land that they traditionally owned. Be it noted that the institution of tenancy was viewed as a progressive measure, since it developed private property in line with capitalist relations of production.

One major implication of the southern conquest was the paradox of a section of the Ethiopian nobility calling for the establishment of a strong central state. I say "paradox" because nobles have everywhere shown an entrenched determination to curtail the power of kings. It was not so for the Showan nobility: it needed an emperor heading a strong government without, however, such emperor having any design liable to challenge its privileges. Haile Selassie responded appropriately to his call: he read into the contradictory demand of the Showan nobility the possibility of establishing absolutism, which alone could appease his personal craving for power. He would protect and even enhance the privileges of the Showan nobility in exchange for absolute power.

The sociopolitical origins of Haile Selassie's absolutism stemmed from this encounter between the obsession for power of a highly placed individual and the particular need of a privileged class. Indeed, the determination and machinations of a single individual, however uncommon he may have been, are not enough to explain the rise of autocracy. Haile Selassie's success in exercising absolute power for such a long time suggests that structural causes have backed his personal obsession with power. Chief among the structural causes was the land tenure system established in the south.

The southern expansion instituted two different systems of land ownership in Ethiopia. The traditional system of the north, known as the *rist* system, allowed ownership of land to peasants through inheritance right derived from both

father and mother. This "right to claim a share of land based on kinship to a historical ancestor held in common with other *rist* holders" had one obvious merit, namely, the prevention of landless peasants.⁹ One of its serious downsides was the growing fragmentation of holdings subsequent to the growth of population, since the latter entailed the multiplication of claims over the same portion of land. The fragmentation motivated individuals to seek higher social positions through political or military functions so as to claim a greater share of the land held in common.

Superimposed on the right to inherit land was *gult* right, which was the right to collect tributes from *rist*-owners. Some estimates say that *gult* dues could "run as high as 20 percent of the small holder's crop."¹⁰ However, unlike *rist* rights, *gult* was not usually hereditary; rather, it was "an overright to tax" granted by emperors to local government officials, religious institutions, local gentry and others.¹¹ In the unusual situations where *gult* rights became hereditary, they were called *rist gult*. Such rights were confined to members of royal family and influential provincial nobles. The purpose of *gult* rights was obviously to serve as payments to lords and state officials for their numerous services to the central state and local communities. These services included administrative, judicial, and military functions. *Gult* rights were also given to the church for its spiritual services.

The southern expansion gave birth to a different system of landholding. Moving away from the security of holding afforded by the *rist* system, the southern conquest brought about the dispossession of peasants. While private tenures were rare in the north, they became frequent in the south, as more and more peasants were deprived of their traditional right to land and turned into tenants. The origin of these private tenures is easily traceable:

The private tenures were created when the crown confiscated land conquered by its armies and granted vast blocks to a wide range of people and institutions. Grants were made to soldiers, northern civil servants who came to administer the new areas, peasants moving south because of land pressure in the north, local tribes that did not resist the conquest, local village and clan chiefs to gain their support, church officials . . . and a host of central and provincial elites close to the crown.¹²

Even though most of these grants were originally *gult* rights, they were progressively changed into private tenures as state bureaucrats took up most of the functions of the northern grantees and local chiefs. To quote John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub,

Initially, the grantees of *gult* land performed a wide range of administrative and judicial functions. In the early days after the conquest they virtually controlled the lives of tribute paying peasants. However, as the local government system penetrated the countryside and field agents of major ministries appeared in rural towns many of these functions were eroded.¹³

Because of the erosion of their social functions, grantees of *gult* could defend their right only by becoming land owners through the progressive dispossession of southern peasants and their transformation into tenants. Unlike the north, where rights to land were established by kinship, in the conquered south no such right could be claimed. Consequently, private ownership was the only way by which the conquerors could establish their right to land.

The Landed Class and Autocracy

The specific features of the southern landed class disclose its need for an autocratic rule. The northern system was justified both on grounds of tradition and local nobles having a real social basis. Different was the situation in the south since the relationship of the landed class to the local producers was that of an outsider, culturally as well as politically. To keep control over a vast territory and progressively integrate its people into the Ethiopian society, Emperor Menilik at first relied on the traditional system of granting *gult* rights to his generals and other officials. Since he had not yet developed a full-fledged state bureaucracy, he had no other choice but to grant administrative and political functions to those who had directly participated in the expansion. Nevertheless, with the progress of state bureaucratization, especially during Haile Selassie's reign, these officials could maintain their granted privileges only by changing their *gult* rights into private tenures through the dispossession of the native people.

The process of dispossession could not but arouse the anger and resistance of the traditional owners. Contrary to the north, however, the nobility could not recruit a local army to protect its vast holdings. The rise of a central government endowed with a mobile and overwhelming power of repression thus emerged as a necessary condition for the sustenance of the southern system of landholding. Since the expropriation of land by northern settlers and the reduction of peasants to tenants had created the volatile and explosive situation of a landed class implanted in a hostile environment, some such social formation required a centralized state power with a powerful army.

Centralization implied that the bureaucracy and the army had to be detribalized so that their loyalty goes to a single center of power. Only through the creation and prominence of a single center of legitimacy and obedience could all forms of localism be dissolved. The dissolution of localism was necessary to change the subordination of one ethnic group to another into private dealings between nationals. Hence, the need for a form of political power in which a single individual both concentrated power and became a transcendent center of obedience. The integration of the conquered people into a transcendent order diffused their localism and, by the same token, the source their resistance, while the exclusive obedience of the bureaucracy and army to a transcending individual raised them to the level of national institutions. In short, the whole system called for an imperial autocrat, that is, for a soaring power that alone could legitimize the southern system.

Haile Selassie perfectly responded to the need of a supreme form of power. He demanded absolute power in exchange for guaranteeing the southern land expropriation. In becoming the transcendent center of power, he nullified all localism so that rights and legitimacy flowed from his person alone. All the ideological organs of the regime, with their deafening cult of personality and constant reference to "the Elect of God," thrust the idea of Haile Selassie as the sole source of legitimacy into the head of each Ethiopian. When such a power extends its protection to the southern system, land possession ceases to be an act of confiscation. That is why

for the ruling class in the south, the expansion of central government control in their region offered the most effective and least expensive assurance for their massive landholdings. . . . Consequently, this group had little to fear from the growth of centralized power, and much to gain from the development of the apparatus under the control of the centre.¹⁴

Only the non-Showan nobility of the north, which was a minor participant in the expropriation of the southern land, continued to oppose centralization and autocracy. The interests of the nobility were not similar in the south and in the north. The abolition of *gult* rights had no detrimental effect on the southern landed class. On the contrary, it opened the path to private holdings through dispossession. The case was different for the non-Showan nobility, since the prevailing *rist* system allowed the grant of privileges only in connection with office holding and not landholding. Because on the one hand, the *rist* system stood in the way of privatization and on the other, privileges depended on the maintenance of administrative and political functions, the increasing appropriation of these functions by state bureaucrats rendered the preservation of *gult* rights obsolete—an outcome detrimental to the northern nobility. Thus, both centralization and modernization proved to be a direct menace to the non-Showan nobility.

That is why the process of centralization proved arduous in the north. In 1941, an imperial decree imposed restrictions on the power of the aristocracy.

The new regulations forbade them [provincial officials] to raise military forces, to maintain their own police units, to negotiate and sign treaties with other states, to impose and collect taxes and dues other than those fixed by the central government, to accept money and other gifts from the people, and to appoint, dismiss, or transfer subordinates on their own authority.¹⁵

To abolish *gult* rights without angering considerably the non-Showan nobility, the decree had a provision for "the payment of salaries to provincial officialdom from the central treasury."¹⁶ As a matter of fact, because the process of centralization proved long and arduous, Haile Selassie had to resort constantly to appeasing measures. Thus, even though "in 1944, the taxation system was revised, and all customary forms of tribute were outlawed," thereby giving the Ministry

of Finance the exclusive right to collect taxes, these measures did not fully eliminate *gult* rights.¹⁷ Instead, "the *gultegna*'s share came out of the land tax. Moreover, the *gultegna* was exempted from the payment of land tax on his own *rist* or personally claimed land."¹⁸

The long fight and the concessions on the part of the central government show the high level of resistance of the non-Showan nobility to state centralization. One explanation for its bold resistance was "its ability to manipulate peasant sentiment and have it ranged on its side in every confrontation with the centre. . . . The peasant's susceptibility to such manipulation stemmed from the age-old fear for the security of his *rist*."¹⁹ Unlike the southern landed class, the northern nobility could still rely on its local authority and support to oppose the intrusions of the central power.

However adamantly the non-Showan nobility opposed centralization, it did not go to the extent of challenging the imperial power. Aware of the formidable power that the imperial government mastered as a result of the southern expansion, it preferred to extract various concessions from the emperor (tax exemption, grants of land, etc.) in exchange for supporting absolutism. The reaction of the Ethiopian nobility to royal absolutism followed the path taken in such countries as France and Russia where nobles preferred "to extract concessions from the monarchy either in the form of a restoration of old privileges or of the creation of new ones in the guise of restoration" rather than removing monarchical power or curtailing its power, as in the case of the English Revolution.²⁰

Feudalism or Absolutism?

Students of Ethiopian studies have long clashed over the correctness of calling the Ethiopian *rist* system "feudal." In light of heavy taxation, tribute, and corvée labor imposed on peasants, some authors argue that "all the elements of feudal relations are interwoven through the intermediacy of the *gult*."²¹ On the other hand, underlining the absence of landless peasants, other authors maintain that the use of the term "feudalism" is inappropriate to characterize a system that refrained from developing serfdom. With the rise of the southern system of tenancy, however, the rejection of the concept of feudalism becomes harder to defend.

The rejection would have been indefensible were it not for the absence in the southern system of yet another crucial feature of feudalism. For no sooner does one argue in favor of the existence of Ethiopian feudalism by showing the effective appearance of tenancy in the south than a marked divergence from the feudal system emerges. Whereas feudal lords in Europe and elsewhere had conquered autonomy *vis-à-vis* kings, the Ethiopian system generated absolutism, thereby annihilating the traditional autonomy of the landed aristocracy. Basing himself on this anomaly, Dessalegn rightly discards the description of Haile Selassie's regime as feudal or feudo-bourgeois. Though it had some feudal characteristics, such as "a hierarchically-constructed system of personal dependency relationships, a rigidly ordered behaviour, [and] Byzantine language," it had one

basic difference with feudalism: "whereas feudal polities are inconceivable without the parcelization of sovereignty, the centralization of authority and the construction of an integral politico-social order was the most important achievement of the old state."²² Moreover, unlike European feudalism, no traditional system of shared beliefs and values justified the local power of the southern landed nobility. On the contrary, the nobility in the south was culturally alien to indigenous peasants and was looked upon as outsider.

Dessalegn offers a long discussion to illustrate the relevance of the Marxist theory on the relative autonomy of the state. Because the state can thus soar above the class it is supposed to serve, the Marxist theory of the state, Dessalegn argues, can help us understand the rise of personal absolutism, such as Haile Selassie's regime. However, he pushes too far the notion of relative autonomy, and so lends himself to the criticism of depriving the regime of social basis. If Haile Selassie represented neither the nobility nor the bourgeoisies, what else remains but to speak of a personal dictatorship? We need to understand that the political marginalization of the nobility in favor of absolutism was an outcome of its own need. Inversely, absolutism required the maintenance of the nobility as a legitimizing factor, even though the modern state had appropriated most of its functions. In other words, since the state could defend the interests of the nobility (most notably of the southern nobility) only by assuming an autocratic nature, a common interest bound together the autocratic ruler and the nobility.

One question comes to mind: if the non-Showan nobility did not or was unable to challenge the monarch, even though centralization brought about its political marginalization, with many of its traditional functions passing over to the central state, then why did Haile Selassie preserve a class that he had so undermined? The question is all the more relevant since the preservation of the nobility obstructed the modernizing intent of the emperor by forcing him to defend outdated privileges. The wrong answer to the question is to suggest that Haile Selassie was not strong enough to get rid of the nobility. Such is the position of John Cartwright, who maintains that

the exemption from land tax illustrated that while Haile Selassie could reduce by roundabout means the nobility's power to challenge him, he could not bring about significant structural changes by a direct frontal assault on the nobility's land wealth, their main source of power.²³

The explanation rests on questionable assumptions. Thus, it insinuates that Haile Selassie sincerely wanted to reform the land system, but the nobility prevented him from doing so. It also attributes to the nobility a power that it no longer possessed, as shown by its utter powerlessness to stop the nationalization of land during the first years of the Revolution. Besides, the explanation contradicts the previous position of the author stating that Haile Selassie had greatly reduced the power of the nobility by shifting "the balance of power substantially to the central government and against the landlords."²⁴

The success of centralization actually suggests that Haile Selassie was the protector, the sustainer of the nobility. The latter could not exist without the protection of the central government, especially in the south. Then why did he not eliminate altogether a class that had become not only useless but also damaging to his modernizing project? The need to sustain autocracy, and that need alone, explains why Haile Selassie refused to push for land reform, despite external and internal pressures, the consequence of which would have been the demise of the landed nobility. The elimination of the landed nobility would have entailed the collapse of the social and cultural factors legitimizing the imperial autocracy.

We forget that Haile Selassie based his legitimacy, not on a secular and nationalist ideology, but on the traditional ideology portraying the emperor as the elect of God and defender of the Church, to which he added his personal charisma. Unlike many modernizing autocrats, he did not bother to legitimize his rule by the formation of a political party committed to a nationalist and populist ideology of the type represented by Nasserism or Peronism. Haile Selassie's regime was a type of autocracy that is not "just any form of personal dictatorship but one that remains highly traditional in the political sense, and thus is inconsistent with the creation of significant modern political parties or the formulation of compelling official modern ideologies."²⁵ Because of the traditional referent, Haile Selassie's legitimizing discourse required the preservation of the social context of privileges, both of the church and the nobility. To erase these privileges would deprive autocracy of social respondents. Only when he sat at the top of a hierarchy of privileges did his autocratic rule appear as the crowning of an objective order. The main reason that explains the maintenance of the nobility is, therefore, the need to preserve a proper social context of imperial legitimization.

Let it be added that only the traditional form of legitimization could satisfy Haile Selassie's immense craving for absolute power. Rightly, Tim McDaniel defines his regime as "the most extreme case of autocratic rule in modern times."²⁶ The fact that he wanted a personalized absolute power could not but dissuade him from desiring the creation of a party through which he could obtain popular support and mobilization. This kind of legitimacy was degrading for him: it would make his power accountable to the people and to an artificial organization when he was emperor by tradition and the will of God. Recall that he has consistently defined himself as the one "chosen with the Grace of Almighty God the anointed Emperor of Ethiopia."²⁷ This traditional reference excluded the need for a new ideology and the formation of a political party. Moreover, not being a ruler who seized power by overthrowing a traditional king or a democratically elected leader, new references were not required. In Haile Selassie's eyes, only usurpers needed a party, not traditional leaders.

Was Haile Selassie a Modernizer?

The role allotted to tradition gives us the occasion to settle the question of knowing whether Haile Selassie was ardently supporting the modernization of Ethiopia. Students of Ethiopia are divided on the exact intention of Haile Selassie's

reformism. Was Haile Selassie a modernizer at heart, or was he simply using modernization to promote absolutism? Underlining his early opposition to the camp of the traditionalists in favor of modernization and the subsequent fact that he became the leader of the modernist faction, thereby obtaining the support of the Japanizers, many authors argue that his commitment to modernization was sincere, at least at the beginning. One such author writes:

From 1926, when he was appointed regent, *ras* Teferi shared power with Zauditu, daughter of the deceased Emperor Menelik. In this uneasy division of power at the center, Teferi became the leader of the "modernist" faction—the "young Ethiopians" who criticized "tradition" and maintained that Ethiopia had to adopt Western ways in order to prosper and progress in the modern world. They were opposed by a conservative faction focused on the Orthodox church and Empress Zauditu.²⁸

When asked to explain the slow pace of Ethiopian modernization, authors convinced of Haile Selassie's modernizing will put the blame on the conservatism of the traditional nobility and the Church. They claim that "he has modernized as fast and far as he was able in the face of traditional opposition."²⁹

The fault with this explanation is that it does not reflect the full reality. Conservatism defined not only the nobility, but also Haile Selassie himself, especially during the last years of his reign when his reluctance to reform even surpassed the most conservative members of the nobility. Beyond changes pertaining to state centralization and consolidation, no major reforms altered the Ethiopian society, even where changes were critically needed. Moreover, nothing is more-questionable than the assertion that the nobility blocked Haile Selassie's modernizing will. The assertion suggests that he was not fully successful in countering the resistance of the nobility. In reality, he enjoyed full power and could have really modernized Ethiopia by making the necessary reforms if such had been his intention. Seeing the extent of his power, he could have introduced whatever reforms he wanted without major resistances from traditional forces. The latter were weakened and compelled to depend entirely on him, so that necessary reforms were not made less because of nobles' resistance than because of Haile Selassie's own reluctance.

In contrast to his lukewarm modernizing will, his commitment to establish and fortify autocracy was enduring and overriding. Indeed, all his modernizing reforms fell under the exigency of strengthening his personal grip on power. The autocratic project explains the alterations he introduced in the traditional system, which alterations were designed not so much to reform tradition as to neutralize elements of the traditional system inimical to absolutism. To accomplish his autocratic agenda, he erected bureaucratic, financial, political, and military institutions, all designed to concentrate power in his person. Unraveling the absolutist inspiration of Haile Selassie's reforms, Edmond J. Keller reminds us that "such bureaucratic institutions were created not only to facilitate exploitation but also as a counterbalance to traditional elements that remained extremely power-

ful. The ultimate objective was to foster royal absolutism."³⁰ This means that his failure to modernize and, by extension, the emergence of revolutionary forces, must be explained, not by the resistance of the nobility against reforms, but by the very nature of the imperial regime itself.

Take the vital issue of land reform. In 1968, the imperial government drafted a proclamation expressing the need to regulate tenancy. However, the project was dropped soon after because it did not earn the approval of the Parliament. Since the Parliament was simply a rubber stamp and had no autonomy, nobody bought the argument that it was responsible for the lack of reform. The bare truth was that "Haile Selassie was not committed to land reform: he could have promulgated reforming laws as Decrees under Article 92 of the (now-suspended) Revised Constitution of 1955, rather than waiting for Parliament to proclaim them."³¹ By sending the project to a Parliament notorious for its harsh conservatism, Haile Selassie found a way to exonerate himself in the eyes of Western governments—especially the Swedish government—which were pressuring him to change the land tenure system of the country.

To doubt Haile Selassie's modernizing will is not to deny that the church and the nobility were also opposed to reforms. But the interesting question is: what kind of reforms did they oppose? Without doubt, the reforms that Haile Selassie, first as regent and then as emperor, proposed and implemented, namely, centralization and consolidation of the imperial throne, satisfied neither the nobility nor the church, especially those of northern regions. One consistent characteristic of Ethiopian history is the uninterrupted fight between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Just as elsewhere in the world, in Ethiopia the church and the nobility, especially regional lords, naturally resisted centralization and jealously defended their regional autonomy. What Haile Selassie and his supporters demanded of them in the name of modernization was the relinquishing of many of their powers in favor of the central state. Is it surprising if the nobility and the church hierarchy became extremely suspicious of modernity and started to oppose it? For them, modernization meant nothing more than the loss of power in favor of the central power and resisting modernization amounted to defending their traditional privileges. They had everything to lose and nothing to gain, especially as concerns the northern nobility. The great exception was, of course, the Showan nobility: as we saw, Showa became the launching pad of modern autocracy in Ethiopia because of the need to defend the southern system of tenancy.

The Fiasco of Grandeur

One way of settling the issue of Haile Selassie's sincerity as a modernizer is to look into his foreign policy. According to some scholars, the external policy of Haile Selassie was successful while his internal policy was not. One such scholar is Teferre Haile-Selassie, who writes:

Haile Selassie's external relations with the West had been very successful indeed. He had gained its trust and confidence which bolstered his image as one of the most seasoned statesmen of the world. His sound foreign policy and its careful execution had earned for Ethiopia respect and prestige. In Africa he was held with great esteem as the founder of the OAU and the elder statesman of Africa.³²

However, speaking of the internal policy, the same author says: "the regime's failure to introduce timely reforms that would respond to the new realities, fomented dissatisfaction."³³ These two statements appear contradictory: how can the same person show high qualities of statesmanship in one field and not in another equally required field? If the person knows the secret of successful foreign policy, how comes it that he fails to show the same wisdom in internal policy?

The contradiction disappears if we add the following factor: though Haile Selassie was willing to modernize Ethiopia, "his love of power and unwillingness to share it with his subjects, caused his downfall."³⁴ In other words, he fared well in foreign policy because he intended to use international reputation to further enhance his internal authority. His quest for personal glory by means of foreign policy was thus part of Haile Selassie's autocratic project. Unfortunately, the project did not go hand in hand with modernization for the simple reason that a successful modernization required sociopolitical developments antithetical to autocracy. Among the conditions of successful modernization, the two requirements most unacceptable to Haile Selassie were the open society based on merit rather than on personal allegiance and the sharing of power. Because he ruled out even a minor form of democratization, he pursued a contradictory policy in foreign and internal fields: he used his foreign reputation to perfect absolutism, that is, to postpone the sociopolitical developments necessary to bring about modernization.

The conflation of modernization with the quest for personal glory encouraged megalomaniacal pursuits. Examples from other countries confirm my statement. For instance, the Shah of Iran devoted the rich oil revenue of the country to the building a powerful army in the hope of becoming an important regional player. Another example is Nicholas II: his grandiose vision precipitated Russia into costly and unpopular wars that intensified the social discontent. Both autocrats made "the effort to create an urban industrial society as a prerequisite for present or future claims to great-power status."³⁵ Haile Selassie, too, mobilized his diplomatic skills to become the leader of Africa so as to have a strong international standing. His megalomania induced him to coin modernization in terms of spectacular showoffs rather than in terms of improving the concrete conditions of life of the people. The preference for self-exaltation over the implementation of real and deep changes induced him to hide the 1973 terrible famine that struck northern provinces. To admit the famine and call for international help would have exposed the utter poverty of the people despite his long reign. Likewise, in 1968 his vanity advised him to imprison the homeless in Ad-

dis Ababa so as to hide the gruesome reality of urban destitution from the participants of a heads-of-state conference organized by the Organization of African Unity.

Many Ethiopianists will find my assessment of Haile Selassie too harsh, especially in light of his remarkable effort to develop modern education. If anything, such effort to spread enlightenment should temper the criticism of the pursuit of personal glory. Unfortunately, the need to consolidate the imperial state with modern means completely overrode Haile Selassie's effort to expand modern education. For him, graduates of modern schools and universities were essentially people whom he could co-opt to consolidate his rule. "Seen as a means of creating a new cadre of officials to assist in the process of political centralization and the consolidation of the emperor's personal power," modern education was thus at the complete service of autocracy.³⁶ The limited expansion of modern education and the stubborn refusal of the emperor to allow any kind of autonomous political representation to the educated elite confirm the underlying autocratic design.

Bahru attempts to distinguish two phases in Haile Selassie's long reign. He characterizes the first phase, which comprises the period going from his regency to the proclamation of the Revised Constitution of 1955, as progressive. During this time Haile Selassie was clearly ahead of his class in his determination to modernize the country. The second phase began when Haile Selassie started to take measures that blocked progress. In particular, the 1955 Revised Constitution left the Parliament and Senate without any power and autonomy and maintained the ban on party politics. Instead of giving up some of his powers, the emperor emerged as the sole player with sweeping powers, including the right to appoint senators, convoke, suspend, and dissolve the Parliament. This strengthening of absolutism inaugurated the phase of reaction.

Bahru's distinction loses much of its importance when he himself admits that Haile Selassie implemented progressive measures only so long as they supported his absolutism. He writes: "when we say Haile-Sellase was progressive in the early decades of his career, we do not mean so much that he stood for progress for its own sake, but rather that progress was a concomitant of his quest for power."³⁷ How could there be concomitance unless one uses the questionable argument that the concentration of power in the hands of one man was the sole path to Ethiopia's modernization? In other words, the "progressive" measures have to do with the centralization of power, such as the creation of a modern bureaucracy and a standing national army, both designed to weaken the nobility and the traditional regionalism. Clearly, these measures reflected less the initiation of a progressive course than the goal of consolidating autocracy.

Generally speaking, studies enter an impasse if, losing sight of the fundamental inspiration of modern autocrats, they credit them with a modernizing intent. The approach draws on the unsubstantiated assumption that modern autocrats really want to modernize their country, albeit using the wrong methods. An example is John Foran, who notes:

The core concept of autocratic modernization itself raises some logical and historical problems: Was the shah really committed to the reforms he sponsored? If he had been, maybe autocratic modernization would have worked or evolved into a real constitutional monarchy.³⁸

The very expectancy of a truly modernizing autocrat overlooks the incompatibility between autocracy and modernization. A truly modernizing scheme advocates an open society and so is a threat to autocracy. By definition, autocrats want a limited modernization, that is, a modernization strong enough to undermine traditional elites but weak enough to maintain modern classes in a subdued condition. The best way to achieve this situation is to weaken traditional elites without eliminating them altogether while allowing a restricted development of modern classes. The inevitable conflict between traditional and modern sectors crowns the autocrat as the sole arbitrator of the situation. In this way, hampered by their mutual conflict both sectors remain dependent on the autocrat.

Many studies underline how skillfully Haile Selassie played off traditional forces against modern forces. Such a divisive strategy could only limit the extent to which he was willing to modernize the country. It reveals that he espoused the cause of modernization essentially because it gave him the means to achieve absolutism. The flip side of this policy was the incompatibility between the obsession for absolute power and the requirements of modernization. Haile Selassie introduced all those aspects of a modern state that forge centralization and consolidation, while rejecting all those aspects of the modern state limiting absolute power, such as the creation of independent political parties, the establishment of autonomous parliamentary and judiciary systems, etc. The equation of modernization with absolutism was, thus, the fundamental contradiction of his regime. He failed to understand that the modern measures that he promoted to achieve and consolidate absolutism, namely, the creation of a national army, the introduction of modern education, and the establishment of a modern bureaucratic system, would not tolerate for long the limitations of absolutism. Their own dynamics would progressively drive them to demand the right to participate in decisions affecting the fate of the country.

By the way, striking similarities appear between Haile Selassie and the man who happened to overthrow him, to wit, Mengistu Haile Mariam. The obsession with absolute power and the framing of institutions to satisfy the craving define both of them, just as the development of ominous forces to themselves and to what they claimed to represent resulted from their clinging to absolute power even as conditions required urgent reforms. However, this study does not pursue the parallel, mainly because it focuses on the revolutionary outcomes. It uses the concept of narcissism to explain both Mengistu's rise to power and fall (see the chapter on narcissism and revolution) without investigating the question of knowing whether the concept is applicable to the case of Haile Selassie as well.

This chapter has studied the sociopolitical parameters that laid the ground for the rise and consolidation of Haile Selassie's regime. To understand the gathering of discontent, the next chapter will attempt an insight into the inner

workings of the regime with the view of showing how these workings hindered the progress of modernization and shaped the social forces that brought down the system.

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The Politics of Cooptation: Strengths and Weaknesses

In defining Haile Selassie's regime as an autocratic rule, the last chapter unraveled the sociopolitical conditions that led to a tightly centralized state around an absolutist monarch. The preceding chapter had already established the ideological source of state centralization, notably the identification of modernization with centralization. What remains to be studied is how a political leadership successfully navigated for decades through the process of modernizing a country while systematically avoiding the implementation of structural changes.

Monarchical Patterns of Change

Traditional monarchies challenged by modernization have displayed three possible patterns of change. According to Samuel P. Huntington, the monarch

could attempt to reduce or to end the role of monarchical authority and to promote movement toward a modern, constitutional monarchy in which authority was vested in the people, parties, and parliaments. Or a conscious effort might be made to combine monarchical and popular authority in the same political system. Or the monarchy could be maintained as the principal source of authority in the political system and efforts made to minimize the disruptive effects upon it of the broadening of political consciousness.¹

Obviously, the evolution toward a constitutional monarchy is the path most appropriate to the requirements of modernization. The monarch accepts a symbolic role legitimizing a government accountable to an elected body, such as a parliament. Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, etc., provide examples of constitutional monarchy. Despite its suitability to modernization, the constitutional path is most difficult to achieve, given that monarchs are extremely jealous of

their power. The case of monarchs willingly transferring their power to instances emanating from popular elections in exchange for a symbolic role remains quite rare.

Monarchs unwilling to limit their power had the option of combining traditional authority with modern institutions. The option preserves the traditional authority of the king while allowing political competition through the recognition of modern political parties. In this way, monarchs show their commitment to modernization without surrendering their traditional authority. To quote Huntington,

If modernization is unavoidable, what can be done about expanding the power of the political system to make it bearable? Is there any reason why it should be impossible to combine monarchical rule and party government, to institutionalize competitive coexistence in the polity of two independent sources of power?²

The composite solution was tried in such countries as Greece, Morocco, and Iran. Experience has shown that the system cannot last, as invariably conflicts develop between the monarch and the elected bodies. For instance, King Hassan II of Morocco allowed competition between his supporters and the socialist party acting as the opposition. However, when the latter won the majority, continuous crises developed whose consequence was that Hassan II dismissed the Parliament in June 1965 and ruled by himself.

The third pattern acknowledges the incompatibility between the authority of the monarch and institutions emanating from popular elections. The monarch himself assumes the task of modernizing the country but in such a way that the modernization process does not hamper the exercise of his absolute power. In particular, the system rejects political competition through the legalization of political parties. Libya, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, and of course, Ethiopia provide examples of the third model. Their common feature was that they "showed no signs of relinquishing their firm grasp on power or of accepting other sources of legitimacy."³ The main problem this pattern faced is obvious: in order to safeguard his absolute authority, the monarch must limit the pace of modernization, thereby multiplying sources of discontent. Above all, the attempt to contain modernization will have a frustrating impact on modern classes which, though still limited, play a crucial role in the running of the modern sector.

The study of these absolute monarchies encounters the problem of explaining the resilience of some of them. After all, such monarchies look so outdated in a modern world that they seem condemned to a short life. Yet Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia for forty-five years, during which time he successfully countered all the attempts to overthrow him. He would have probably added more years, if not for his old age (some scholars purport senility) weakening his strong-hold on the country. What is the explanation for the resilience of a regime so incongruous with the requirements of modernization?

The System of Dependency

I put forward the thesis that the implementation of a social system that systematically generated dependency best explains the longevity of Haile Selassie's regime. We have to understand that the concentration of power in one man was an outcome of social forces polarized around irreconcilable interests. The last chapter indicated that the nobility in the south had developed interests antagonistic to the traditional system of land ownership, as well as to the implementation of modern reforms. We must add that the penetration of modern ideas and methods was by itself a menace to all people desperately trying to preserve outdated privileges. Beset on all sides, the nobility could not but put its fate in the hands of an autocrat perceived as a bulwark against threatening changes. In a situation where privileges no longer retain their traditional sanctions, those sticking to outdated rights must rely on a providential and ubiquitous autocrat to defend them.

As we saw in the last chapter, by accepting the protection of the central state, the Ethiopian nobility paved the way for its own marginalization. Nobles gave up their traditional rights to raise a local army and administer their fiefs in exchange for the absolutist state's protection of some of their privileges. Thus, "the Ethiopian Constitution of 1931 granted . . . him [Haile Selassie] control over both central and provincial government and virtually excluded the former nobility from any position not granted by the throne."⁴ The more nobles accepted the protection of their privileges by relinquishing their traditional social functions to the central state, the higher became their dependence on the centralized state. It follows that the state cannot protect these privileges without restricting the progress of democratization, and hence, slowing down the pace of modernization. The enormous risk here is that the state uses modern forces to slow down modernization. The only way by which this restriction can work is through the extreme personalization of power as a result of which loyalty to the autocrat becomes the mode of functioning of the entire society. Herein lies the key to Haile Selassie's long reign: for an extended period he had successfully harnessed the functioning of the modern sector, especially of its military component, to the norm of loyalty to his person.

One consequence of the personalization of power is that the state emerges as an autonomous force. To protect privileges in this modernizing society, the government has to command an efficient repressive power as well as achieve a personalization of state power such that the monarch becomes the exclusive source of social norms through a systematic usage of personality cult. The condition for the efficient protection of privileges in a modernizing society that wants to limit reforms is that "the government has to become separate from society," including from the landed nobility.⁵ The fact that Showan owners held land as a private tenure in a community to which they did not belong and for which they did not accomplish any social function other than the appropriation of the products of native peasants, could not be maintained without a strong and personalized center of power. The latter was all the more necessary the more those who lost their land were told that they had become Ethiopians. The rise of

a transcendent center of power gave a mystifying allure to their becoming Ethiopians. The recourse to mystification compensated for the lack of recognition of equal rights to the newly integrated people.

A landed class seeking the protection of an autocrat meant a new opportunity for Haile Selassie. In effect, rather than initiating its eradication, he chose the path of turning it into a subordinate class. Two main reasons explain his political choice. As already indicated, Haile Selassie needed the nobility to preserve the social foundation of his imperial rule. The imperial ideology would be meaningless in a society devoid of the traditional justification of the emperor as the defender of the Orthodox faith and of a social hierarchy of privileges. The abolition of privileges would simply undermine the foundation of his own rule. As Edmond J. Keller puts it:

The emperor could not completely ignore or subjugate traditional elements even if he desired to do so. One important reason for this was his heavy reliance on such elements for his legitimization. Traditions, their symbols and their agents, were what made such societies cohere. The legitimization of the rulers of historical bureaucratic empires was mainly religio-traditional.⁶

The second reason is that, as the primary concern of Haile Selassie, autocracy necessitated the blockage of democratic reforms. Only from a landed nobility, to which he provided the protection of its privileges, could Haile Selassie draw the support he needed to counter democratic forces. Because of this common interest, "the royal authority could not afford to alienate the nobility altogether."⁷ The political system of absolutism, especially of personal autocracy, cannot survive in a process favoring greater democratization. In particular, it must contain the rising power of the educated elite, which naturally demands greater participation in the decisions affecting the national life. This can be done if the nobility, while not exercising power, is made interested in the defense of the monarchy because the latter protects its interests. This common interest in blocking the rising modern forces that question privileges and absolute power was the basis of the imperial regime. Haile Selassie first used modern forces to undermine the nobility by taking away its political prerogatives and then turned it into a subordinate class by becoming the protector of its privileges against modern forces. Having made sure that the class is unable to defend itself, he emerged as its sole protector.

The defense of privileges guaranteed the complete allegiance of the nobility to an autocratic rule increasingly resented by modern forces. Since modernization meant democratization, and with it, the appearance of competing political forces, Haile Selassie's main problem was how to consolidate centralization with modern means while avoiding the developments that lead to democratization. His solution was to shape the traditional nobility into a counterforce to democratization by assuming the defense of its privileges. Centralization ensured the preservation of the landed class but in such a way that it made it dependent

upon the imperial power, that is, it took away the traditional functions of the landed class while protecting its privileges.

Delay of Land Reform

Nothing could better show the commitment of the imperial regime to the protection of outdated privileges than the postponement of the much needed land reform. Let us establish first that land reform was the best way to strengthen the state and generate revenues necessary to support a modernizing program. Seeing the importance of the agrarian sector in Ethiopia, one would think that the state would generate most of its revenues from land taxes and other related activities. The bare truth, however, was that land taxes were so low in Ethiopia compared to other countries at similar stages of economic development that we had the incredible situation of an agrarian nation generating "more government revenue from its alcohol taxes than from its land tax."⁸ According to Peter Schwab, statistics show that "in 1966/7, revenue from land taxes and tithe totaled less than 4 per cent of total government revenues."⁹

Though the regime needed increased revenues to run the modern sector with such expensive institutions as an enlarged bureaucracy, relatively sizeable military and police forces, and an expanding system of education, much of the revenue it could have obtained from land was appropriated by the landed class and the church. Not only were the church and nobles often exempted of taxes, but also the pocketing of their disproportionate shares from tenants represented substantial revenue lost to the state. Outside the imperative of protecting privileges, there is no answer to the question of why the regime did not initiate reforms to increase its revenues by eliminating some of the rights of the church and the nobility. True, under the 1966 Proclamation 230, "the rights of all non-church *gult* holders were effectively terminated," since it stipulated that "the tribute payer under the *gult* holder was to pay the tribute to the provincial treasury offices of the Ministry of Finance."¹⁰ That the producer was required to pay land tax was obviously a measure taken to increase state revenue. Even so, however, since the southern peasant was paying rent to the landlord, "what taxes [were] collected [tended] to be squeezed out of the peasant by his landlord and transferred to the treasury."¹¹ Naturally, the portion of surplus that went to the state was greatly reduced.

In case one thinks that Haile Selassie did not reform the land tenure system because he was not fully aware of its importance, the following excerpt of a speech he made as early as 1961 proves the opposite:

The fundamental obstacle to the realization of the full measure of Ethiopia's agricultural potential has been, simply stated, lack of security in the land. The fruits of the farmer's labor must be enjoyed by him whose toil has produced the crop. The essence of land reform is, while fully respecting the principle of private ownership, that landless people must have the opportunity to possess their own land, that the position of tenant farmers must be improved, and that the system of taxation applying to landholdings must be the same for all. It is Our

aim that every Ethiopian own his own land, and, in implementation of this principle, We have Ourselves set the example by ordering that certain lands in Arussi Province heretofore administered by Our Ministry of the Imperial Court be distributed to the tenants working on them, against payment by each man only of the nominal fees charged for the transfer and the registration of this property in his own name. This has been the basic objective of virtually every modern program of land reform; this is the ultimate goal of the study now being undertaken by the Committee on Land Reform.¹²

Though the speech states that the lack of security in land ownership is seriously holding back the economic progress of the country, outside the promise of providing land to landless peasants, it does not go to the extent of questioning the vast system of tenancy in the south of the country. It advocates the improvement of the position of the tenant—most probably by regulating the terms of the contract—not the elimination of tenancy. While this cautious approach certainly appeased the landed class, the suggested solution could not remove the main obstacle to Ethiopia's prosperity which, as acknowledged by the emperor himself, originated from the fact that peasants did not enjoy the fruits of their labor. It is hard to see how the preservation of tenancy, however improved it may be, could grant tenants the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Nor can we assume that Haile Selassie was not aware of his inconsistency.

Another assumption that we must immediately discard is the belief that Haile Selassie did not undertake land reform because he was not powerful enough to antagonize the landed class. So expressed, the assumption reverses the hierarchy prevailing in the imperial regime. As already indicated, dispossessed of its traditional powers by the centralizing process, the Ethiopian nobility was not in a position to oppose any serious resistance to the emperor. Let us not forget that the availability of modern means, notably the control of modernized and well-armed military and police forces, essentially financed by Western governments and entirely committed to his person, gave the emperor a power that the nobility could not withstand in any way. Add to this the erosion of its traditional functions, which had significantly reduced the ability of the nobility to mobilize peasants against the central government. Having lost all the means to defend itself, the nobility was totally unable to defend its privileges without the protection of the autocratic government, let alone rising against it.

The main reason why Haile Selassie postponed land reform is to be found, not in the strength of the nobility, but in the need to keep it as a dependent force. The whole scheme is to draw the nobility into the defense of autocracy. This cooptation emanated from the complete reliance of the nobility on the central state to defend its obsolete privileges. This reliance made it so defenseless that it came to the conviction that its future was tied to the survival of the autocratic monarch. In other words, the tenancy system had organically linked the landed gentry to the emperor, who protected its privileges in exchange for absolute power. The context of modernization assaulting the nobility from all sides had

created the need for a custodian. In return, the custodian used the servile nobility as a counterforce against modern forces opposing autocratic rule.

Another related reason for Haile Selassie not to push for land reform was that it undermined his abilities to multiply clients. After establishing that Haile Selassie and the ruling elite were all well aware of the problems caused by the lack of land reform, Andargachew Asseged attributes the preservation of the land tenure system to the emperor's need to distribute land to his supporters so as to buy their loyalty. Naturally, those who benefited from such grants eagerly supported the continuation of Haile Selassie's rule. The proof for the need to buy loyalty is the dramatic increase of imperial land grants after the 1960 attempted *coup d'état* against Haile Selassie.¹³ To the extent that the existing land tenure system allowed him to expand the circle of his supporters, it is understandable that he was reluctant to reform it, even if he came under great pressure to do so, especially from some Western governments.

Because of the delay of land reform, a situation that looked very much like the one that happened in France under royal absolutism developed in Ethiopia. Let us refer to Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of the causes of the French Revolution. In order to answer his main question, namely, why the revolution broke out in France and not elsewhere where it was equally, if not more, possible, Tocqueville considers the status of French feudalism. He discerns a paradox: the revolution broke out in France although most of the shackles of feudalism were already removed. Theoretically, revolution should have broken out in a country like Germany, since "in almost no part of Germany, at the end of the eighteenth century, was serfdom completely abolished, and in most parts the people remained attached to the soil, as in the Middle Ages."¹⁴ By contrast, serfdom had been removed from most parts of France. The peasant was mobile: he "came and went, bought and sold, made contracts and worked as he wished."¹⁵ Moreover, centralization had divested the nobility of its traditional political and administrative tasks, which were taken up by state officials. "Not only did the lord no longer control the administration of . . . local matters, he no longer supervised them."¹⁶ This transference of the power of the nobility to the absolutist state contrasted with the case of England, which "was administered as well as governed by the principal landowners."¹⁷

Given this basic alteration of the feudal system, the question is why a fierce hatred of the regime grew in France and not in countries where feudalism was still intact. The explanation that peasants in France were more dissatisfied and angry at their lords because they were more exploited and oppressed than in other parts of Europe, though common, is not accurate. Since most peasants were no longer serfs, their dues were lighter than elsewhere if only because they were delivered from the lord's grip. Tocqueville's explanation for the paradox of a revolution occurring in a country where feudalism was anything but functional is both commanding and paradigmatic. He finds that feudal privileges still survived, nay intensified, even though the political and administrative structures of feudalism had been removed. In his own words,

What seems truly peculiar to France, is that at the same time that the order of the nobility thus lost its political powers, the noble as an individual acquired several privileges which he had never formerly possessed, or increased those which he already had.¹⁸

The most hateful of these privileges was none other than tax exemption. Far from being abolished, this inheritance from the past was actually expanded.

The maintenance of privileges without the attendant social functions, which were taken up by the absolutist state, explains the fierce hatred for the nobility in France. What else could the preservation of privileges without social functions suggest but the image of a blood-sucking and socially useless class? By divesting the nobility of its social functions while maintaining its privileges, royal absolutism had turned its privileges into unjustifiable, scandalous rights. Witness: in countries where the nobility had still a social function, as in England and Germany, the preservation of privileges did not arouse the same kind of hatred, even if they were greater. The fact that the nobility had privileges was seen as reward for its social role. In particular, the absence of absolutism in England was attributed to the increased role of the nobility in the Parliament. This gave birth to the image of a class acting as a counterforce to royal power and as a promoter of freedom. Unlike France, the nobility in England had remained politically and administratively active and was perceived as an agent of modernization: it had not become an anachronistic and obstructing remnant of the past.

Tocqueville's analysis throws light on the case of Ethiopia. Just as in France, imperial centralization had deprived the Ethiopian nobility of its traditional functions without however removing its privileges. As a result, the nobility became an anachronistic and parasitic class. Moreover, the lack of administrative function had diminished its power so that it was also severely handicapped. Haile Selassie neither pushed the nobility toward greater participation in the effort of modernization nor attempted to remove its privileges. He politically neutralized it in exchange for the maintenance of its privileges, thereby turning the whole class into a barrier against modernization, and as such the object of intense hatred, especially by students and the educated elite. The preservation of privileges was, as Tocqueville saw it, a bribe, a way of consoling the nobility for the loss of political power. The strategy cornered the nobility into becoming the adversary of modern forces, all to the great advantage of autocracy.

In default of a party whose creation, as we saw, never crossed Haile Selassie's mind, the only choice left for him to attract supporters was the system of cooptation through the grant of lands, privileges, and lucrative appointments. Rather than a common ideological commitment, what united his supporters was loyalty to his person obtained through preferential treatments. Insofar as such treatments induced dependency, they extolled the arbitrary nature of autocratic rule, that is, the notion that power resides in the person of the autocrat rather than in established institutions and formalized procedures. That the regime was based on the personal power of Haile Selassie, and not on some party or movement, totally sidelined institutions and organizations, just as it downplayed the

need for a new ideology other than the traditional legitimization of the emperor as the elect of God. The extreme personalization of power explains the surprisingly rapid disintegration of the regime following the success of protest movements in tarnishing his reputation and moral integrity.

The Cooptation of the Church

No less than the nobility, the Ethiopia church had traditionally acted as a counterweight to the power of emperors. Many important events of Ethiopian history testify to the powerful influence of the church. To begin with, the ideology of the imperial throne defining the emperor as the elect of God closely involved the church into the political process by investing it with the power of anointment. This religious ceremony was believed to be the real process of consecration, the moment emperors acquired legitimate power. The fact that in Ethiopia real legitimacy originated, not from the possession of royal blood, but from the religious consecration, gave great authority to the church. The customary practice of granting inalienable lands to the church illustrates the extent to which Ethiopian emperors were anxious to maintain a good relationship with religion and its institutions.

That the clergy, especially the educated elite of monks and priests—who used to serve as scribes to princes and kings—was “a formidable force in the Ethiopian body-politic for over a millennium is manifested by the roles it played in the doings and undoings of monarchs and dynasties.”¹⁹ Chapter 4 gave us the examples of Emperor Susenyos and Lij Iyasu renouncing the throne subsequent to their conflict with the church. Another case is Emperor Tewodros: one contributing factor to his downfall following his confrontation with the British was the loss of church’s support because of his decision to tax and even confiscate church lands and revenues. The truth is that no emperor was able to keep his throne while being in open conflict with the church.

Because this formidable power of the church was antithetical to autocracy, Haile Selassie undertook the laborious task of undermining the foundations of its authority. Thus, “the 1955 constitution . . . explicitly stated that the emperor, as well as being the head of state was also ‘Defender of the Faith and Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.’”²⁰ This last provision inaugurated the protracted process of the church losing its traditional autonomy and becoming a servant of the state. Haile Selassie acted *vis-à-vis* the church the same way as he dealt with the nobility. In the name of modernization, he removed all the traditional factors ensuring the autonomy of the church, but maintained its privileges. In this way, in exchange for the preservation of its privileges, the church was compelled to give unconditional support to the imperial autocrat.

The decline of the church started with an apparently positive measure, namely, the Ethiopianization of the *Abun*, the head of the Ethiopian church. Breaking with the tradition granting the right to choose the *Abun* to the Coptic Patriarchate in Alexandria, an Ethiopian-born *Abun* was nominated in 1951. This change put an end to the unacceptable practice of allowing a foreigner to

serve as head of the Ethiopian church. However, it had an inevitable downside: while the previous practice guaranteed autonomy, the church was henceforth "cut off from the only remaining external source of legitimacy that was beyond the emperor's control."²¹ With an Ethiopian at its head, it had become more vulnerable to imperial encroachments.

As a result, the significance of church autonomy was eroded and its role remained tied more closely than ever to the service and support of the crown. This development gained its most resounding expression in the revised constitution of 1955, which made appointments to key posts in the church hierarchy subject to imperial approval. In addition, the emperor was empowered to promulgate all church regulations other than purely spiritual and monastic ones.²²

To these imperial interventions was added the measure that sealed off the definitive decline of the powerful influence of the church, to wit, its expulsion from the realm of modern education. Dissolving the long tradition giving the monopoly of education to the church, Haile Selassie transferred the right to the state through the establishment of a ministry of education endowed with extensive educational prerogatives, one outcome of which was the proliferation of modern secular schools. That an increasing number of young Ethiopians attended these secular schools meant the weakening of the ideological power of the church, especially on the rising educated elite. It is indeed

appropriate to consider the rise and fall of the Ethiopian church as being intimately related with the rise and fall of its monopoly of education. The power traditionally wielded by the church in Ethiopian history was derived more from its monopoly of the entire pedagogical system and the socializing and legitimizing intelligentsia it produced than in its role as the guardian of the faith.²³

As if this were not enough, Haile Selassie did nothing to slow down the penetration of Western missionaries, who were quick to inaugurate various schools. When in 1950 he decided to open the first college in Addis Ababa, he gave the responsibility of supplying the administrative and teaching staff to American Jesuits. The Mormons replaced the Jesuits when "in 1961 a University of Utah survey team organized the graduation of the college into Haile Selassie I University."²⁴

The loss of autonomy to the imperial state was manifested through the financial dependence of the church: "the state supported all church activities by public funds, and paid salaries to its officials."²⁵ In return for this support, the church had to associate the teaching of Christianity with the glorification of the imperial autocracy, thereby becoming the official ideologue of the regime. Likewise, since Haile Selassie had acquired the right to appoint or approve key officials, the cardinal criterion was loyalty to his person rather than the ability to serve the church. The primacy of personal loyalty meant that the emperor "overlooked individuals of great caliber and talent, thus stifling creative change and independent initiative" because such individuals were not accommodative

enough to this absolutist agenda.²⁶ This same imperative led the emperor to use extensively the tactics of divide and rule. To prevent the patriarchate from becoming independent and taking initiatives unfriendly to the autocratic ruler,

semiautonomous institutions were created which acted in competition with, and even against, the patriarchate, as well as separate channels of communication with powerful local church establishments. Thus, in line with the tradition of the court clerics, certain abbeys and monasteries were made to function independently of the patriarchate, under benevolent protection of the emperor, as is the case with the Holy Trinity Church under its dean, Habte Mariam.²⁷

This tight imperial control explains the political aloofness of the church during Haile Selassie's long reign. As in other institutions, Haile Selassie had successfully created a docile and corrupt clerical hierarchy that prevented the church from playing its traditional role of counterweight to the imperial power. Gone was the time when the church successfully mobilized the people against emperors who betrayed the national religion. Turned into an instrument of autocracy in the name of modernization, the church was cut off from the lives of the people with the consequence that it became dependent upon the state.

Since the emperor simply imposed the so-called modernizing reforms, the church came to see modernization as a threat. What else could the loss of power and influence induce but a tendency toward conservatism as a last attempt to safeguard something of the church's past glory? In particular, the church became very suspicious toward modern education, to the point of wanting to shelter priests and deacons from the influence of modern ideas. The way it dealt with the establishment of a theological college provides a characteristic illustration of its resistance. The imperial state justified the opening of a theological college in 1944 as a necessary means to form "an educated and enlightened clergy in place of an ill-trained and reactionary priesthood."²⁸ With the inauguration of Haile Selassie I University in 1961, the college became one of the university's branches and came under its administration. This transference signified that the church had lost control over the selection of students, the design of the curriculum, and the day-to-day administration of the college. To express its frustration, the church leadership decided to ignore the college "by refusing to ordain the graduates of the college."²⁹ It also declined to employ the new graduates.

To attribute the refusal of college graduates to stubborn conservatism would be a one-sided view. The truth is that the church deeply resented the fact that it had no say in the process of its own modernization. Modernization did not mean the enhancement of the church, but its transformation into an instrument of the state. Under this condition, hardly could the church be excited about modernization. The emperor's policy of imposing modernization from outside in order to avoid the rise of an autonomous institution has undoubtedly contributed to the conservatism of the Ethiopian church.

If centralizing policy resulted in the effective decline of the traditional influence of the church, there emerged the question of knowing whether so re-

duced a church was of any use to the autocratic leader. Notably, as Paulos Milkias rightly observes,

By removing education from its domain and becoming his own minister of education, Haile Selassie took the most important step towards reducing the church into a non-political national institution; in other words, making the support of the church, for all practical purposes, irrelevant to his imperial power.³⁰

Why, then, did Haile Selassie still defend an establishment that he had so purposely diminished? Why did he so eagerly protect its immense wealth and land ownership while knowing the extensive damages to its authority caused by his centralizing policy? Not only did the church significantly expand its wealth through new imperial land grants that were exempted from tax, but also "although traditional tributes were eliminated in 1944, in 1947 a new decree ordered their continuation only to the Church."³¹ Even when the nobility lost its *gult* rights in 1966, "only the Church continued to enjoy this feudal privilege."³²

We already know the answer: given that the emperor did not coin a new ideology despite his proclaimed modernizing goal, he needed the ideological function of the church. As we saw, he drew his legitimacy from defining himself as the elect of God, in line with the traditional justification of emperorship. Moreover, even if the church lost its ascendancy over educated modern Ethiopians, its influence was still intact on ordinary people, especially among peasants. Lastly, the intention of his reforms was not to weaken the church's influence, but to undermine it just enough to make it dependent on the throne, thereby securing its loyalty. The best way to secure its loyalty was to preserve its privileges, which allowed the emperor to portray himself as the defender of those privileges against the assault of modern forces. The church was thus induced to believe that bad things would inevitably occur if the monarch was removed or replaced.

We recognize here an all-too-familiar method: first Haile Selassie's pushes for modernization and threatens traditional forces, such as the nobility and the church, and then emerges as the defender of these forces through the preservation of privileges, once the traditional forces are weakened enough to become dependent on him. These altered traditional organs are then used as a counterforce to forces inimical to autocracy. What sustained the traditional forces was not their traditional functions, which were taken up by the modern state, but the maintenance and grants of privileges. Such forces had no other choice but to support the imperial autocracy.

Atomization of Social Life

The politics of cooptation that Haile Selassie systematically applied to ensure the loyalty of the nobility and the church hierarchy was even more vigorously pursued with officials involved in the running of the modern sector. Be they army generals, state ministers and directors, governors, members of parliament, high-level bureaucrats, etc., all owed their position directly or indirectly to the emperor. They knew that their social status, the lavish gifts of land, and other possessions were all rewards for their loyal service to him and that the slightest dissenting behavior would entail their demotion. Though most of these men had received modern education and professional training, they were quite aware that they owed their position less to their individual merit and professionalism than to the imperial protection.

In assuming absolute power to the extent that state officials, the landed class, and the church hierarchy appeared as his mere executors, Haile Selassie deprived them of power base, in fact of any power that did not directly flow from his person. Since his person alone conferred legitimacy, state officials and traditional elites "lacked bases for independent action in either traditional or modern terms."³³ The sustenance of personal authority through the undermining of the political legitimacy of the nobility and of the autonomy of modernizing elites could not but undercut the political fabric of the traditional order without, however, putting in place the features of a modern society. As John W. Harbeson writes:

Haile Selassie's centralization of power occurred in form, while in substance the emperor aggrandized his personal rule at the expense of more traditional as well as more modernizing elites. More modernizing elites were denied the institutionalized authority their formally modern roles seemed to imply, while their cooptation appears to have cost them credibility as advocates of socioeconomic as well as political change.³⁴

The modernizing elites' lack of credibility had one important implication. It meant the absence of alternative political leadership when the time of change finally came. In emasculating the nobility and the modernizing elites by making them wholly dependent upon him, Haile Selassie had emptied the political life of the country of alternative forces, thereby paving the way for the rise and preponderance of underground revolutionary groups. This was particularly illustrated in February 1974 when the proliferation of strikes, demonstrations, and mutinies in the barracks compelled Haile Selassie to appoint Endalkachew Makonnen as the new prime minister. Though Endalkachew "called upon some of Ethiopia's best educated, Western-trained and reform-minded elites to form a cabinet that would generate wide-ranging reforms," he could not convince the country of his reformist commitment because himself and all the people he had gathered were irrevocably marred by the imperial cooptation.³⁵ Most people did not see them as independent enough to really reform the existing system, and so began to listen to revolutionary groups.

Because co-opted social groups are perceived as mere executors of the autocrat, the decline of the latter entails their automatic disgrace. Such groups are of little use when social protests break out: the lack of a power base of their own divests them of any social leadership. In effect, in all spheres of social life, the separation between groups in leadership positions and the people was maximized under Haile Selassie. The top levels of the armed forces were cut off from enlisted soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers. In the sphere of education, the same separation was observed between students, teachers, and administrators. Ordinary priests were detached from the clerical leadership, just as workers were disconnected from management, peasants from landlords, etc. The rise of the Derg will soon confirm that this widespread disconnection between the various echelons of leadership and the society could not but favor the ascent of clandestine groups.

The Ethiopian situation strikingly resembled the condition that prevailed in Russia and Iran. In these countries, too, autocracy had sucked leadership capacity from social elites so that no forces internal to the existing political order were able to assume the leadership of social protests. Just as happened in Ethiopia, the revolutionary path of clandestine groups prevailed over reformist groups. Studying the effect of autocratic rule on social elites in Russia and Iran, Tim McDaniel writes:

A distinguishing feature of autocratic modernization, as compared to other patterns of development, is the political frailty of both traditional and modern social elites. Even if we consider only those countries with a strong state role in industrialization, such as Germany, Japan, or contemporary Brazil, we note that neither the agrarian elites nor the nascent industrialist classes were so controlled by the government or so weakened in their capacity for social leadership as in Russia and Iran. These, indeed, were the two key dimensions of the social elites' debility in the latter countries—their dependence on an often-unreliable state for their welfare and their lack of leadership over other social groups.³⁶

The atrophy of social leadership is a direct outcome of autocratic modernization. Modernizing autocrats undermine both traditional and modern elites so as to establish the conditions of their unrestricted personal power. They do not create conditions for the rise of new elites, either: the suppression of democracy and autonomous social organizations block the process of elite renewal. Instead, they pick their own trusted people and political leaders from among existing elites by relying on the only criterion that matters for them, namely, loyalty. Because such people are often corrupt and incompetent and, what is more, simply superimposed on the existing system, they cannot assume any real leadership. The exercise of personal authority to the detriment of law and institutions thus prevents the emergence of groups capable of assuming social leadership. Autocrats want to be surrounded by yes-men who are both completely devoted to them and devoid of any ambition or vision. These often mediocre individuals accept serving the autocrat because of the possibility of social gains and illicit

enrichments. Lacking an iota of independence *vis-à-vis* the autocrat, such people cannot offer any alternative when the state breaks down as a result of protests.

Even if able persons manage to survive, they are not given the opportunity to show their ability. A method characteristic of autocrats is the constant shifting of high officials from one position to another to avoid the build-up of leadership around their person. Thus Haile Selassie "has never allowed any Ethiopian to remain in high office long enough to build up too sizeable a following and become a threat to his own position."³⁷ This method of constantly moving officials has no doubt contributed to ward off *coups d'états*, but it has also led to the removal of popular and able people. In particular, the practice has had a detrimental effect on the armed forces, since mediocre and corrupt generals, who did nothing but intensify discontent among soldiers and young officers, replaced able commanders.

McDaniel calls "atomization" the dissolution of autonomous centers of leadership.³⁸ For the dominance of the autocrat to be absolute, the society must be devoid of any ability to self-organization so that individuals and institutions remain isolated and unable to develop any vertical or horizontal solidarity with other individuals and institutions. The purpose of atomization being the prevention of collective opposition, wherever it was systematically applied, has generated a society that

was an agglomeration, not a tissue of overlapping and interdependent groups, and it had no principle of cohesion internal to itself. Autocratic modernization undermined solidarity based on shared identities and traditions as well as the more modern form based on interdependence and shared commitment to law.³⁹

Take Haile Selassie's practice of constituting the close circle of his associates with individuals coming from different ethnic groups and social classes. The practice was meant neither to promote the equality of ethnic groups nor to open up avenues for social mobility. Rather, it was to prevent the development of solidaristic relations. The mixture of individuals coming from different ethnic groups and social backgrounds stifled the formation of solidarity in favor of mutual suspicion and individual rivalries. This lack of unity allowed the emperor to play successfully one individual against another.

Enough is never said about the vulnerability of fragmented societies to the influence of radical groups. Facts indicate that radical groups have a hard time attracting workers organized in trade unions that operate freely. But when workers are denied the right to organize or when individuals at the service of autocrats control their organizations, they tend to look for leadership elsewhere, thereby becoming receptive to the slogans of radical groups. The tendency to radicalization is also a frequent outcome among students whenever they are denied the right to have independent unions. What these examples prove is that the suppression of democratic rights and self-organization prevents the emergence of "moderate leaders with the authority to restrain social militancy when it emerge[s]."⁴⁰ This is the story of Russia and Iran; it is also the story of Ethiopia.

The choice between discredited elites and radical groups drove the three countries to support anything but the status quo.

Both the absence of alternative paths and the reliance on elites cut off from their power base bring out the internal weakness of autocratic states, even if they outwardly exhibit an impressive repressive apparatus. When people are fragmented, the state has little control over the society because all the intermediary links are either weakened significantly or dissolved completely. As a result, when political confrontation occurs, it takes the shape of a conflict between the autocratic state on the one side and the society on the other, with no intermediaries to temper the antagonism. The irony of this situation is that the creation of docile elites to achieve autocracy makes these same elites unable to counter the forces opposing the autocrat. Worse yet, even when these elite finally decide to get rid of the autocrat because his refusal of reforms endangers their future, they are so weakened that they are unable to remove him, thereby passing the initiative to radical groups. Herein lies the dilemma of autocrats and their supporters:

Because dictators often view economic and military elites as their chief foes, they may attempt to weaken and divide them in various ways, even though such groups share with dictators a counterrevolutionary orientation. By weakening counterrevolutionary elites, however, dictators may unwittingly play into the hands of revolutionaries, since such elites thereby become too weak either to effectively oppose the revolutionaries or to oust the dictator and reform the regime, thereby preempting revolution.⁴¹

What is said here enlightens, to a great extent, the most important event of the Ethiopian Revolution, namely, the formation and the rise of the Derg. When the social protests broke out, they perfectly reflected the situation of co-opted elites being unable either to protect the autocratic emperor or to remove him. The impotence of the military leadership was particularly noticeable. Indeed, nothing could better show the paralyzing effect of the systematic weakening of traditional and modern elites than the situation in the armed forces. Wary of a military *coup d'état*, Haile Selassie undertook the systematic weakening and division of his military elite, with many corrupt and mediocre generals often occupying crucial positions. Even as the social protests amplified, the weakened military hierarchy could not come up with a united position. Still less was it able to plan and execute a classical military coup. It was so discredited that it had lost all authority over ordinary soldiers, NCOs, and junior officers. It finally collapsed when the Derg—an elected and underground body—appeared and seized power. The inception of the Derg was thus the direct outcome of the discredit and powerlessness of the higher echelon of the armed forces. Alas, it was also the beginning of an unpredictable path such as only the leadership of an erratic group could initiate.

The 1960 Coup d'État

Haile Selassie's long reign testifies that the cooptation of elites can ensure the long survival of an autocratic regime despite its political weaknesses. Provided the autocratic leader institutes a mechanism by which the dependence of elites is systematically maintained, there is little chance for a successful internal dissent. A good illustration of this was the failure of the attempted coup of December 1960. While Haile Selassie was on a state visit to Brazil, the commander of the Imperial Guard, General Mengistu Newaye and his university-educated brother, Girmame Newaye, attempted a *coup d'état* that was defeated after a violent confrontation with the army and the air force. The coup was the first open expression of discontent; it was also highly surprising since it was initiated by a general who had the full confidence of the emperor and executed by an institution purposely created to protect him.

It would be wrong to confine the discontent to General Mengistu and his brother. According to a long interview that Michael Imru, then an influential member of the aristocracy, gave to *the Ethiopian Reporter*, many among the Western-educated aristocrats and non-aristocrat officials were quite aware of the severe limitations of the imperial regime and saddened by the backwardness of Ethiopia. Discussion groups were formed in which Girmame himself was an active member. These "groups often used to hold meetings to discuss these problems at Itege Hotel (now Tayitu Hotel).⁴² In the various discussions they had, they "came to the conclusion that social changes were necessary to bridge the gap between what were then called industrialized countries and backward countries and accelerate national development."⁴³ One of the top issues discussed was the question of "land reform."⁴⁴

If such influential members of the ruling elite were convinced of the need for serious reforms, why didn't they take any action against the autocratic emperor? The answer is that Haile Selassie did not allow any expression of protest, especially of organized protest. Even members of influential families were extremely fearful of Haile Selassie's reactions, all the more so as the regime had such a vast and efficient network of intelligence that it can be said that "it had spies all over the country."⁴⁵ That is why Girmame, who is generally believed to be the ideologue behind the uprising of the Imperial Guard, saw no other solution than to plan a coup with his brother.

Both the failure of the coup and the prevailing atmosphere of fear confirm the extent to which members of the ruling class itself were made powerless against the autocratic emperor. They also show how repression and the prohibition of all autonomous organizations had banned the possibility of a reformist movement originating from the ruling class itself. A quick analysis of the failure of the coup reveals the method used to emasculate the ruling class. According to Christopher Clapham, the coup failed because the rebels lacked organization and support:

There was in Ethiopia only a very small group of people capable of responding to such appeals, and even within this group the response was at best ambivalent. Most important of all, there was no response among the younger officers of the armed forces.⁴⁶

Besides their narrow support, the rebels failed to neutralize all the important members of the nobility, notably the "influential nobleman, Dajazmach Asrata Kassa, and the Chief of Staff, Major General Mared Mangasha."⁴⁷ Having secured the support of the patriarch, these individuals organized and led a successful counter coup.

Without denying the importance of the factors set down by Clapham, one can wonder whether the lack of support was not itself an effect of the divisions prevailing among the military elite. What explains the failure of the coup is not so much the narrowness of the support as the divided nature of the elite. Had the military hierarchy been united even in a loose manner, the coup would have been successful. We make the wrong assumption if we credit loyalty to Haile Selassie as the primary inspiration of the leaders of the counter coup. What was most intolerable to the generals who organized the counter coup was that a successful coup meant the inevitable rise and hegemony of General Mengistu and his associates. As a matter of fact, negotiations were initiated but failed to quell the unleashed conflict for power.

This entrenched rivalry was none other than the product of Haile Selassie's policy of divide and rule. The elite class was composed of rival groups that could neither trust one another nor work together to accomplish a common goal. By keeping alive these rivalries, the emperor had thus established a system in which competing individuals and groups constantly neutralized one another. This divide and rule policy was most apparent in the armed forces: "the army and the Bodyguard were two entirely separate military formations, which Haile Selassie kept apart in rivalry to one another."⁴⁸ Since the commander of the Imperial Guard had no authority in the army and vice versa, the two formations stood as rival institutions that could never work together. They were only connected through Haile Selassie, who commanded both branches of the armed forces and was therefore indispensable to their coexistence.

Though the coup was quickly put down, Ethiopianists agree on its great significance and far-reaching consequences, which they say amounted to a major turning point. The existence of an opposition within the ruling elite itself and the open denunciation of the autocratic and detrimental system of government had definitively undermined the myth portraying Haile Selassie as a well-intentioned modernizing monarch. The demystification "awakened society particularly the elites and students from their political slumber."⁴⁹ On top of heightening political consciousness among civilians, especially among students and intellectuals, the coup exposed the vulnerability of the imperial power. It also revealed that the dissatisfied section of the ruling elite was harboring ideas advocating liberal reforms. The rebels promised "sweeping reforms. They pledged that the new regime would ensure freedom of speech, freedom of press, and allow political

parties for the first time. . . . There were plans to introduce a constitutional monarchy and to dismantle feudalism."⁵⁰ Although it is difficult to tell whether this liberalism would have had a concrete realization if the coup had succeeded, it is nevertheless clear that the leaders were fully aware of the necessity of urgent and deep-going changes.

Another important implication of the coup was the upgrading of the political standing of the armed forces, as "the soldiers realized that it was their intervention that helped the emperor regain his throne."⁵¹ Officers and soldiers considered themselves as the saviors of the regime and understood this to mean that the emperor was indebted to them. They immediately showed their expectation by demanding a substantial pay increase and improvement of conditions of life. The dramatic events that followed the coup give a good idea of the awareness of their new-found role. To mobilize soldiers, the leaders of the countercoup had promised a substantial increase of salaries. However, arguing that the nation could not afford the promised increase, Haile Selassie proposed a more modest amount. The proposal angered the troops, especially the noncommissioned officers and soldiers. On March 20, 1961,

a large body of dissident soldiery marched on the Jubilee Palace and after forcing a side gate gathered under the portico and demanded that the Emperor hear them. Haile Selassie appeared and received what the soldiers stated was a forty-eight hour ultimatum demanding a further increase in salary.⁵²

The emperor had no other choice but to announce "a further monthly increment in pay and allowances of E \$16 a month for all soldiers."⁵³ Clearly, this unprecedented defiance reflected the growing awareness among the troops of the importance of the armed forces as the sole defender of the regime, and hence as the main political force.

A no less important implication was the lesson that the military gleaned from the defeat of the coup, namely, that rivalries between the various formations of the armed forces as well as among the military elite explain the failure of the coup. When another situation of rebellion arose in 1974, young officers made sure that the error of the past was not repeated. This precaution was an important factor in the creation of the Derg: an elected committee in which all the units of the armed forces and the police were represented was a helpful protection against conflicts fomented by personal ambitions and rivalries within the military hierarchy. We cannot emphasize enough how paralyzing the fear of division and conflict was in the armed forces. In light of the increasingly defiant attitude of soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers, one really wonders why the military waited fourteen years to overthrow the regime. There is only one explanation: Haile Selassie's policy of divide and rule had so handicapped the military establishment by inserting rivalries and mutual suspicion that it had become incapable of acting in a concerted fashion. No doubt about it, Haile Selassie survived for so long, not because the military defended him, but because they were made unable to act against him (more on this issue in Chapter 9).

This impotence of the armed forces would have probably continued were it not for the explosion of civilian unrests during the month of February 1974. The next chapter will analyze how the structural limitations of the regime led to social uprisings under the impact of internal as well as international aggravating circumstances. The latter raised the tensions dividing the society to the level of crises, thereby opening opportunities to revolutionary forces.

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Social Blockage and Rising Discontent

The last chapter established how a monarchical system that refused to reform itself undertook a program of limited modernization to sustain itself. What remains to be studied is how the program of modernization through autocratic structures so narrowed the possibility of social mobility that the system gave birth to a generalized discontent, especially to the frustration of rising elites.

Autocracy and Social Blockage

To determine the structural impediments of Haile Selassie's regime, the best way is to rely on the truism according to which regimes fall because they fail to respond to demands for change. A society that is not under the pressure for change has no fear of revolutionary uprisings. Nor is the risk of revolution possible in a society that responds to the pressure by making the necessary reforms. Only societies that resist or want to slow down change are likely to become the scene of revolutionary upheavals. To quote Mark N. Hagopian,

If the existing institutions are resilient enough to bear the strain of the explosion in participation or if incumbent elites are capable of timely and appropriate reform, revolution will not occur. Nor is revolution likely in completely traditional societies immune to social and economic modernization or in modernized societies where institutional changes have kept pace with each new wave of broader participation.¹

The observation brings out the close connection between modernization and the potential for revolutionary conditions. For a traditional society, modernization is a great pressure for rapid and extensive changes. In such a society, too, a strong

resistance to the pressure is likely, given that traditional elites consider modernization as a direct threat to their interests.

Since the context of the modern world can hardly shield societies from modernization, traditional elites attempt to slow down its penetration and protect their interests by blocking political modernization. The blockage creates a characteristic disjunction that delays economic progress and social advancement. Accordingly,

The most fertile ground for revolution is found in "societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change." Revolution becomes more likely as the gap between the level of political modernization and the level of political development widens. A revolution then is a rapid, drastic, and violent closing of this gap.²

The growing awareness that outdated political institutions block socioeconomic progress cannot but inspire revolutionary ideas, which then target the removal of the obstacles to progress. In particular, the conflict between the modern sectors managed by Western-educated natives and political institutions largely controlled by traditional forces takes an increasingly acute form. What explains revolutionary movements is thus not economic backwardness per se, but the perception that institutions designed to protect the interests of outdated elites are blocking social development. As the theory of relative deprivation stipulates, frustration rather than poverty breeds a revolutionary mood.

The frustration becomes greater among rising elites, since the lack of political modernization is obtained through the blockage of the circulation of elites, which blockage essentially means the exclusion of talented and ambitious individuals from decision-making positions. To quote Gaetano Mosca,

In times more recent, violent and far-reaching renovations of old political classes have sometimes come about through internal upheavals. These would be "revolutions" proper. They occur when a wide breach opens between a people's official political organization and its customs, ideas and sentiments, and when many elements which would be competent to participate in government are artificially held in a subordinate status.³

Since modernization brings along fresh people with new and valued skills, it naturally carries the expectation of their incorporation into the elite class. Depending on how the old elite reacts to the pressure to incorporate, two different paths to change become possible. The first is the normal path of the piecemeal integration of new people as a result of which "the decadent elements of the old elite are gradually and almost individually replaced by more vigorous recruits from below."⁴ When this normal circulation is blocked for striving individuals from lower strata of society, with the consequence that decadent elements continue to dominate the upper strata, violent revolutions become imminent. Hence

the definition of revolution: it is "a method of unclogging the channels of social mobility."⁵

What needs to be emphasized here is that the blockage of social mobility has the particularity of encouraging the type of revolution that is called social, as opposed to political revolution, which wants to reform the political system without thereby altering the social structure. Alexis de Tocqueville gives a good insight into the phenomenon of social revolution when he shows that more than the severity of peasant exploitation, the nature of the French nobility explains the radicalism of the French Revolution. As we saw, what was typical of the French nobility was its stubborn rejection of social mobility, even though it had lost all its political and administrative tasks. To block the pressure coming from lower strata, it surrounded itself with outdated privileges that changed it into a closed social caste. By contrast, the English nobility was open to new rising people, in addition to being actively involved in local administration. It also retained its political significance by acting as a bulwark against royal absolutism.

These characteristics of the English nobility called for a political revolution, that is, for a reformist movement seeking the opening of the political system and the limitation of royal power, while the characteristics of the French nobility made social revolution inevitable since rising elites had no other choice to open up the social system than to echo egalitarian principles. For Tocqueville, because the most ambitious and able members of the middle class were not allowed to rise socially,

this left them with nothing to do but to adopt principles, which, although efficacious as weapons against the *noblesse*, were ultimately to be turned against themselves. The most significant of these ideological principles was that of equality. In time it would be utilized by another disadvantaged class to attack the very principle of private property, the source of the wealth and claim to power of the *tiers-état* itself.⁶

To unlock the system, ambitious members of the middle-class adopted an egalitarian ideology, alone able to mobilize the working people against the regime. But this strategy backfired: what was simply a means to unblock a closed system changed into a principle of social organization when disgruntled and marginal elements seized power, thereby precipitating France into the dangerous path of social revolution.

The Politics of Social Blockage

A political blockage akin to that of France drove Ethiopia into a similar path. To put an end to noble privileges, the Ethiopian educated elite used egalitarian slogans to rally ordinary people against the imperial regime. But no sooner had the regime collapsed than disgruntled and subaltern elements in the army and other sectors of the society used the ideology of equality against the rising middle class itself. Not only was imperial Ethiopia a perfect example of a blocked so-

ciety, but also its blockage was most frustrating because it was an uncharacteristic trend. Indeed, as amply demonstrated in my book, *Survival and Modernization—Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present*, traditional Ethiopia had survived for so long because the channels of social mobility were open so that ambitious and talented individuals were able to rise to leadership positions.⁷

With the consolidation of Haile Selassie's autocracy, the channels of social mobility were narrowed to an alarming degree. As we saw, the Showan nobility dominated the political and economic scenes to the near exclusion of other regional elites. Moreover, even though the opening of modern education brought about the social promotion of individuals of humble origins, the system did not allow their integration into the elite structure. Instead, "the educated group [had] become an auxiliary elite serving the traditional power elite."⁸ In short, there was no renewal of elites, as a ruling elite acting as a closed caste dominated the political system.

An objection comes to mind: is not this emphasis on elite competition too narrow to explain a process as complex and pervasive as a social revolution? The theory that elite rivalry for power causes revolution is an approach that gives little room to the role of the working masses, who indeed are not concerned with power struggle. Some such approach seems to overlook the unsettling nature of their anger and the revolutionary content of their aspirations to improve their condition of life. Without their uprisings, what we can have is at best *coups d'état*.

Far be it from me to deny the impact of popular uprisings. Nevertheless, it is also true that the violent expression of discontent of the masses is hardly enough to bring down a regime. As Mosca rightly remarks:

Movements in which the classes that live by manual labor have taken part all by themselves have regularly been repressed with relative ease and sometimes with brutality, and they have almost never helped to effect any permanent improvement in the condition of those classes. The only social conflicts, bloody or bloodless, that have resulted in actually modifying the organization of society and the composition of ruling classes, have been started by new influential elements, new political forces, rising within governed classes (but representing very small fractions of them numerically) and setting out to obtain a share in the government of the state which they thought was being withheld from them unjustly.⁹

Only when rival elites competing for power amalgamate with popular uprisings do revolutionary situations emerge. In addition to weakening the state from inside, rival elites bring one indispensable element to change insurrections into revolutionary movements, namely, the vision of an alternative social order. Moreover, the anger of the masses presupposes a failing economy, which is a consequence of the absence of elite circulation. The impediment to social mobility and the dominant position of incompetent leaders, who care for nothing else

but the defense of their obsolete privileges, cause lingering socioeconomic problems, and this intensifies elite competition.

The suggestion that reforms are refused because modernization threatens the interests of the ruling elite means that

one of the fundamental preconditions for revolution, then, is not so much the poverty of peasants (or workers), but economic change that threatens the relative security and traditional status of men and women living according to norms and habits that are rapidly becoming anachronistic.¹⁰

Unable to confront modern forces as a result of their outdated methods and norms, traditional elites opt for a policy that retards the progress of modernization. While it is true that reforms are refused because they are a threat to traditional elites, it must be added that the imperial power in Ethiopia saw modernization as an opportunity to achieve absolute power through centralization and the political marginalization of the traditional elite. The fact that the monarch welcomed modernization—of course, only to the extent that it strengthened the central power—further complicated and aggravated the social blockage.

Haile Selassie's struggle against the traditional nobility, notably the elimination of its local power through the centralization of the state, remains a memorable achievement. Equally estimable was his effort to introduce and expand modern education and bureaucracy. In principle, these reforms were supposed to facilitate the introduction of a vigorous capitalist system. In reality, as discussed in the previous chapter, they produced the imperial autocracy, which maintained the privileges of the traditional elite while curtailing its political role. A comparison with Japan is here quite instructive.

Like Ethiopia, Japan had inaugurated its modernization with the restoration of the imperial power, but with the crucial difference that the Meiji Restoration did not institute imperial absolutism. On the contrary, it capitalized on the emperor's religious functions to switch actual political power to a prime minister and his government ruling in the emperor's name. With the emperor retaining only a symbolic role, the empowered modernizing oligarchy was able to successfully dismantle feudalism and implement reforms favoring the rise of a dynamic capitalism. The reactionary section of the ruling class could not oppose any meaningful resistance, unable as it was to use state power to block modernization. The reduction of the emperor to a symbolic role created a situation in which his ministers could claim that their far-reaching reforms had his direct blessings. In this way, tradition was used to sanctify the modernization effort.

In contrast to Japan, the combination of imperial autocracy with the preservation of a class with outdated privileges greatly hampered capitalist development in Ethiopia. An important structural cause of the Ethiopian Revolution is indeed this failed modernization, which neither produced an appreciable economic growth nor allowed social mobility. Though the traditional system had been changed under the pressure of centralization and bureaucratization, the institution of autocracy prevented the rise of conditions favorable to capitalist development. It is not that the system did not change enough; rather, it changed

in a direction little supportive of modernity. Though the nobility was politically marginalized, it preserved many of its economic privileges, which acted as hurdles to growth. Likewise, modern institutions had appeared, but the establishment of autocratic rule barred the democratization of the political system. As we saw in the last chapter, the functioning of the imperial regime rested on an agreement between the emperor, the nobility, and other traditional forces, such as the church: in exchange for the traditional forces supporting his absolutism, the emperor defended their economic privileges.

Of all the sectors of the Ethiopian society, the modern sector was naturally most frustrated by the politics of blockage. Given the crucial role of the modern educated elite in the social, economic, and administrative life of a developing country, one would expect its fair representation in the political system where major policy decisions are taken. The opposite happened in Ethiopia: despite its important socioeconomic functions, the participation of the educated elite in the political system was nonexistent. Inevitably, this discrepancy between its political disability and its socioeconomic importance caused frustration that was easily changed into a revolutionary longing. Transitional societies are vulnerable because

two groups in particular play a crucial role in determining the onset of a revolutionary situation: *middle-class groups* in the cities, and the *peasantry* in the countryside. The middle-class includes intellectuals, civil servants, army officers, teachers, lawyers, engineers, technicians, entrepreneurs, and managers.¹¹

The anger of the modern sector further intensifies when, as happened in Ethiopia, the economic failure of the regime begins to threaten the educated elite itself with unemployment and deteriorating conditions of life. In particular, such a threat mobilizes the group most likely to adopt revolutionary ideologies, to wit, the intelligentsia and students. Let us see concretely how the preservation of privileges inspired an economic policy with disappointing performances.

Blockage and Economic Lethargy

As we saw with the issue of land reform, the preservation of outdated privileges could not but delay economic growth in all spheres of social life. To begin with, the protection of privileges directly hampers the implementation of an efficient and productive economic system. To be sure, the nobility and high bureaucrats would like to increase their incomes by adopting efficient methods. The state, too, would like to boost its revenue so as to keep its vast repressive power satisfied. But none of these wishes can come true, as the protection of privileges opposes the reforms necessary to increase production. Speaking of the case of France, Theda Skocpol notes: "France remained a predominantly agricultural society, her economy encumbered by a complex web of proprietary interests that precluded any rapid breakthrough to capitalist agriculture or to industrialism."¹² By preserving feudal features and seigniorial rights, the sociopolitical structures

of agrarian France blocked the modernization of agriculture and slowed down the progress of industry and commerce.

Likewise in Ethiopia, not only did the imperial autocracy preserve outdated rights, but it also added new privileges to silence the nobility and reward state officials, thereby blocking the modernization of the vast agrarian sector. The reason why the much needed land reform was postponed several times flows from an economic policy at odds with the idea of an open and competitive society because of the need to safeguard privileges. In countries where subsistence agriculture persists and commercial agriculture is not yet encouraged, the landed upper class finds itself in perpetual conflict with peasants over the control of land. Indeed,

the wealth and power of the landed upper class depends not on the efficiency of its estates, but on the area of land it controls. The greater the land area, the greater the wealth, the higher the standard of living of the landowners, and the greater their political and social influence. The landed upper class can expand its wealth only by acquiring new lands and can be impoverished only by the loss or division of its great estates.¹³

A commercial or industrial class increases its income by the use of efficient means, not by the amount of land it controls. Such is not the case with the feudal class: as improvement of productivity requires new methods and conditions that the class resents, the protection and increase of its wealth depend exclusively on an expanding ownership of land. Its dependence on increased ownership of land shows its inability to compete with modern methods of production and market forces, which it can only counter by restrictive political means. In thus using political weapons to protect its property against capitalists or efficient farmers,

the landed upper class inevitably develops some set of special land tenure privileges denied the rest of the population. The privileges may involve control of land through conquest, extortion or theft by a militarily dominant elite, systems of special land concession granted to metropolitan nationals in colonial dependencies, and systems of ethnic stratification which exclude most of the population from any access to the political and legal institutions controlling the ownership of property.¹⁴

Needless to say, the need to protect land ownership through exclusion perfectly defined the Ethiopian nobility, especially the Showan elite. As shown in previous chapters, both military power and ethnicity were used to establish special rights over conquered lands.

Because its economic success depends on the competitive principles of the free market, the industrial or commercial class is categorically opposed to political restrictions. The reliance on the free market establishes its need for a free labor, that is, for a relationship with the laboring class that is based on economic ties promising material improvements rather than on political coercion. Different is the need of the feudal class: not only does it restrict market forces by the institution of land ownership privileges, but it also needs a subjugated or servile la-

bor, given that the extraction of its income depends, not on increased productivity, but on the laboring class being deprived of rights, such as the rights of mobility, ownership, organization, and expression of discontents.

Since both the subjugation of the laboring class and the exclusive land tenure rights require the extensive use of state power, in such a social system conflicts easily take a political turn. Obviously, to the extent that the landed class draws its income from subjugation rather than from improved productivity, the system is not prone to compromise. The laboring class cannot improve its conditions of existence through economic gains thanks to improved methods of production. Only land redistribution subsequent to the destruction of the landed class's control of the state can change the situation. Accordingly, those who rise against the system have a single objective: the destruction of the existing state as the only means to remove political restrictions.

When we recall that Haile Selassie and many of his officials acknowledged the need for land reform, only the presence of a need vital for the survival of the system can explain its postponement. Any reform, even the mildest, could not but endanger the foundation of the system by challenging land tenure privileges and the subjugation of the labor force. So crucial was the maintenance of the status quo that the emperor and powerful members of the landed class preferred to sacrifice the great agricultural potential of Ethiopia rather than to introduce reforms endangering their political ascendancy. One factor absolutely clear to most people, including to the ruling elite, was the great dependence of Ethiopia's modernization and economic development on the improvement of agricultural production and the conditions of life of the vast and highly impoverished rural population. As John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub put it, "Ethiopia's prospects for development rest on the dramatic utilization of her agrarian potential. And it will be argued that the key to agricultural progress lies in stimulating the vast, nearly stagnant peasant sector."¹⁵

Despite the wide recognition of Ethiopia's agricultural potential, the imperial government adopted development strategies that completely ignored agriculture as an engine of change and development. Instead, the strategy of import-substitution was implemented with its focus on urban centers and industrial products to the detriment of the vast agricultural sector, which had become untouchable because of political reasons. In following "import-substitution policies rather than a policy of export-led agricultural growth," the imperial government was but honoring the agreement it had with the landed class and the clerical hierarchy.¹⁶ As indicated in the previous chapter, the rural sector was shielded from the invasion of modern forces with the drastic end result that economic growth was sacrificed on the altar of outdated privileges and unlimited personal power. Contrary to the views of some authors, the neglect of the immense agricultural sector was due neither to lack of awareness nor to a mistaken development strategy; it was a deliberate policy designed to perpetuate the conditions of autocratic rule and the hegemony of an obsolete class.

Economists are unanimous in describing the economic performance of the imperial regime as being highly sluggish, even though progress was visible in some sectors of the economy. According to Assefa Bequele and Eshetu Chole,

there has been some development, at times significant, in certain sectors of the economy. Yet this should not obscure the general picture, which is one of a very sluggish rate of development. Isolated advances represent the façade, not the substance of development.¹⁷

Thus, as stipulated by the government's strategy of import-substitution, significant advances occurred in the fields of transport, power production, and manufacture. Assefa and Eshetu note that "transport and communications have expanded at a satisfactory rate of 9.2 percent per annum between 1961 and 1965," while power production "grew at a rate of 18 percent a year since 1965."¹⁸ Equally noticeable was the rate of growth in manufacturing:

The bulk of the increase in industrial production, about 75 percent of the value added, came from textile and food industries. Manufacturing is mostly concentrated in import substituting industries engaged in the production of sugar, cement, oil, textiles and the like. This period, 1961-1965, also witnessed increases in the production of handicraft and small scale industries where production increased at a rate of 7 percent.¹⁹

Two major flaws tarnished this rosy picture: the stagnation of the vast rural sector and of the overall system of income distribution. Thus, "annual rate of growth of agriculture was between 2 to 2.5 percent between 1961 and 1965," even though "a substantial increase in agricultural production in the commercial farms was witnessed."²⁰ This stagnation of the vast agricultural sector could not but significantly slow down the rate of economic growth despite advances in other sectors.

It springs to mind that the major cause for the agricultural stagnation was the land tenure system. Not only were peasants working on lands they did not own little interested in improving output, but also the severe exploitation to which they were subjected did not allow them to benefit in any way from their meager production. Add to this tendency to preserve subsistence agriculture the steady increase of population, and you have the picture of a continual deterioration of conditions of life for millions of people. In rejecting any idea of land reform, the imperial government was, in essence, canceling the progress registered in other areas.

One exception in the rural sector was the relative prosperity observed in coffee growing areas. But here, too, the system of income distribution did not allow poor peasants to benefit from the export of coffee. Generally speaking, be it in coffee production, in other agricultural sectors, or in manufacturing activities, rather than the producers themselves, "businessmen, traders, and owners of capital benefited most, while the large service sector in Addis Ababa benefited only to the extent that it catered for the better-off groups."²¹ Therefore, whatever

progress was achieved in the economic field, it benefited few people because income distribution was appallingly unfair. Prospect for improvements was anything but visible since the use of political coercion prevented people from expressing their discontent. The fact that growth, however limited, only benefited a tiny section of the population testifies to the presence of a rising frustration.

In his study of the pattern of income distribution from 1960 to 1974, Robert S. Love shows a widening gap despite some steady but unremarkable economic growth. Thus, concerning urban areas, scarce available data show that "average annual earnings per employee in manufacturing industry did not grow as fast as did gross output per employee," as most of the increase went to capital or land expansion.²² In the public sector, the pattern was "one of distribution towards the middle range of income, with relative numbers at the upper level unaltered while those at the lowest levels have been reduced."²³ In the private sector, "the lowest paid group changed least, while the proportion in the highest paid groups increased considerably."²⁴ Clearly, the general picture is that the lower strata of the society did not benefit at all from whatever economic growth took place. The widening gap of income distribution also affected the military so that "neither urban wage earners nor members of the Armed Forces had experienced an increase in their share of national income, and may even in many cases have experienced a reduction in their share over the years immediately preceding the [1960] coup."²⁵

Add to this appallingly unfair system of income distribution the fact that the growth was not fast enough to absorb new graduates from high schools, universities, and technical colleges. As a result,

the dwindling of employment opportunities in the public sector in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which manifested itself in unemployment for new graduates and slow advancement for those already employed . . . led to an erosion of the privileged position that [the educated elite] had enjoyed.²⁶

Rising unemployment and stagnating income naturally favored the gradual politicization of graduates of high schools and higher education as well as civil servants.

Both the deteriorating rural economy and an urban growth that only benefited a closed caste were none other than direct manifestations of a blocked society. We see here the compliance of the Ethiopian situation to the conditions of revolution as stipulated by the theory of relative deprivation. According to Ted Robert Gurr, "people become angry when there occurs a gap between the valued things and opportunities they feel entitled to and the things and opportunities they actually get—a condition known as 'relative deprivation.'"²⁷ In Ethiopia, though some economic growth was observed in the urban centers, ordinary people did not profit from it. Such a condition was bound to cause frustration, especially among the educated section with its high political and economic expectations subsequent to its exposure to modern education. In this condition of

generalized urban anger, any sudden or precipitating negative occurrence would be enough to trigger an uprising.

Fragility of Autocracy

Extended frustration over economic benefits was not the only reason for the vulnerability of the imperial regime. As already indicated, the blockage of social mobility cannot be sustained without the political exclusion of rising groups. For traditional classes to protect their privileges in a modern setting, they must rely on states that exclude modern elites. Centralized and dynastic regimes remain the best system of political exclusion; such regimes "restrict elite access to the polity and remain exclusive for prolonged periods without providing any option for change."²⁸ Centralization and dynastic legitimacy were, we know, the key defining features of Haile Selassie's political system.

The truth about imperial regimes is their extreme vulnerability to revolutionary uprisings. On the ground that no consolidated democratic regimes have been ever overthrown, even when faced with severe economic crises, as was the case during the Great Depression or more recently in France of May 1968, scholars tend to consider democracy as a bulwark against revolution. Social revolutions have so far exclusively occurred in dictatorial or imperial regimes. The whole question is to know why "the ballot box has been the coffin of revolutionaries."²⁹

The one reason why democracy wards off revolutionary developments is that

first and foremost, democracy pacifies and institutionalizes—but does not eliminate—many forms of social conflict. . . . Indeed, democracy "translates" and channels a variety of social conflicts—including, but not limited, to class conflicts—into party competition for votes and the lobbying of representatives by "interest groups."³⁰

Since new elections are a few years away, with the chance of peacefully defeating the contested government, recourse to revolution appears unnecessary. Moreover, in a system that allows the right to organize and demonstrate, people have been able to "win important concessions from economic and political elites, although this often requires a good deal of disruption, if not violence."³¹ So long as there is a chance to obtain concessions from the ruling elite, people do not resort to the violent overthrow of the regime.

Where the state is intransigent and controls everything, change necessitates nothing less than the breakdown of the political system. As S. N. Eisenstadt explains,

In societies with highly compact markets, the central controlling mechanisms are an easy target for the processes of change, which often creates a situation of all-or-nothing struggle; the possibility of breakdown within such regimes inevitably increases. Crosscutting markets generate a multiplicity of centers of au-

onomous forces and create opportunities for finding manifold ways to restructure the various institutional spheres.³²

In open and decentralized societies, protests can effect change without seeking to overthrow the state because the centers of decision are multiple and disparate. There is no need to demolish the whole so long as change can occur in a piecemeal fashion. Where decisions are centralized, the possibility of piecemeal changes vanishes: one must first demolish the omnipresent power that controls everything to introduce any kind of change. Imperial regimes thus present the problem of change in terms of all-or-nothing, and so make any change conditional on the violent overthrow of the state. Moreover, because they are centralized, they unify the opposition. Discontents focus on one person, the monarch; they also become highly polarized into a conflict between opponents of the regime and its defenders with no middle ground.

Another important reason why democracy dramatically reduces the likelihood of revolution is that it prevents the rise of conditions empowering radicalized groups. Besides institutionalizing social conflicts into peaceful competitions between political parties, democracy tends to "isolate and render ineffective radical revolutionary challengers."³³ In a situation of open and peaceful competition, moderate elements tend to retain the leadership of social protests to the detriment of radical groups. By contrast, a repressive regime weakens or eliminates moderation so that social protests easily come under the influence of professional revolutionaries who, as underground groups, are alone able to confront undemocratic regimes. In addition, repressive policy radicalizes many segments of the society, especially intellectuals and students. In short, the unintended consequence of repressive governmental policy is the social promotion of radical groups.

One final reason why democracy counters revolution is that it shelters the state from direct attack. In centralized and autocratic societies, the state massively intervenes in the economic process. Any economic conflict turns into a conflict against the state so that "in addition to ordinary political conflicts, states also become the center for economic conflicts."³⁴ Especially in times of economic crises, the pressure on interventionist states increases, as they are made responsible for the crises and the mismanagement of the economy. In a market economy, the confrontation is between economic partners, and so does not implicate the state directly. Better still, where the economy is relatively free of political interferences, the state can intervene as an arbitrator, an impartial mediator in social disputes.

What aggravates the fragility of repressive regimes is their inevitable evolution toward a heavy reliance on the military and often on external support to stay in power. Though a dynastic rule initially enjoys a wide support derived from its traditional roots, "the continuous use of repression may reduce social support for the regime and force it to become dependent on both the military and external support to maintain power."³⁵ The increasing reliance on the military is a consequence of the decline of the legitimizing ideology of monarchical states as a

result of their failed modernization. The problem with the dependence on the military is its intrinsic unreliability. The attempt to protect the military from the influence of the broader context of social conflicts has been defeated time and again. So that,

State reliance on military coercion may enable governments to hold on to power in the short run, but such reliance may prove to be inadequate in the long term. When challenged by broad coalitions that disrupt the social order, governments may not enjoy the loyalty of the armed forces, particularly if rulers do not completely control the military or if it lacks cohesion. In times of crises, preexisting divisions may render the military vulnerable to schisms and defection.³⁶

Lingering social crises directly affect the military, as they point out structural problems that existing governments seem unable to fix. In addition to challenging their loyalty to civilian governments, prolonged crises entail repeated use of military power to suppress discontent, thereby putting the military in the difficult position of further alienating themselves from the larger community. More importantly, the more the regime relies on the military, the more the latter—becoming aware of their indispensable role—start to harbor political ambition. The vulnerability of monarchical systems to military *coups d'état* stems from their increasing reliance of the military to stay in power. As to their reliance on external support, it is even less dependable, as "shifts in international alignments may expose them to unfavorable political decisions made beyond their borders."³⁷

The above characters and fallouts of monarchical regimes were also those of Ethiopia's imperial regime. Like all dynastic states, Haile Selassie's rule looked strong, stable, and well-defended, so much so that nobody predicted the revolution. Yet, the regime collapsed quickly and easily, so easily that some authors seriously maintain that it was overthrown by students. Only the intrinsic fragility of the regime can explain its sudden and rapid collapse. The inability to remove the causes of social discontents, especially of the modern sectors of the society, the systematic use of repressive methods with its polarizing outcomes, including the promotion of radical groups to the detriment of moderation, and the increasing reliance on the military unveiled the fragility of the imperial regime. Rather than the strength of the opposition, what explains the success of revolutions is the internal breakdown and paralysis of the state whose major manifestations, as happened in Ethiopia, are divisions and defections in the armed forces. In other words, "the decisive factor in the occurrence of a revolution is the fragility of the existing political system," and Haile Selassie's government clearly showed all the symptoms of increasing fragility.³⁸

On Skocpol's Views

The understanding that states collapse less because of the strength of the revolutionaries than because of their internal weakness raises the question of knowing what exactly accounts for the sudden inability of the state to use its repressive apparatus. According to Skocpol, the weakness of the state originates not so much from economic discontent (which is always present) as from internal factors of divisions, making it unable to use its repressive power against popular unrests. In particular, the development of a conflict between the state and the traditional nobility has the characteristic effect of weakening the state from inside. Skocpol validates her view through a detailed analysis of imperial states in France, Russia, and China.

Skocpol admits that the landed nobility and the state were rather partners, given that "the imperial states and landed upper classes of prerevolutionary France, Russia, and China were simply partners in the control and exploitation of the peasantry."³⁹ Without the presence of centralized monarchical systems, the landed nobility could not cope with peasant rebellions. However, this partnership did not exclude rivalry

in controlling the manpower of the peasantry and in appropriating surpluses from the agrarian-commercial economies. Monarchs were interested in appropriating increased resources from society and channeling them efficiently into military aggrandizement or state-sponsored and centrally controlled economic development.⁴⁰

The imperial state and the landed nobility were thus both partners and rivals. The system of class dominance over the peasants made them partners, while the appropriation and sharing of surplus set them as rivals. The state could not finance its own program without tapping more revenue from the peasantry, to the detriment of the nobility.

Under normal circumstances, an accommodation is reached whereby partnership prevails over rivalry. But the situation changes and leads to serious conflicts if the state is pressed to modernize. Not only does modernization mean reforms that threaten the interests of the landed nobility, but also increased expenditures, which can only be financed through the state taking more surplus from the peasantry. The pressure to modernize particularly intensifies when monarchical states find themselves in a situation of military conflict against more advanced countries. Thus eighteenth-century France was competing with the more advanced British nation; Russia and China were both challenged by more advanced European nations. In the three countries, the state

found itself in a situation of intensifying military competition with nation-states abroad that possessed relatively much greater and more flexible power based upon economic breakthroughs to capitalist industrialization or agriculture and commerce. Success in meeting this foreign competition depended upon the

ability of the monarchy suddenly to mobilize extraordinary resources from the society and to implement in the process reforms requiring structural transformations.⁴¹

The pressing need to modernize put the three monarchical states on a direct collision course with the landed nobility. This situation of conflict naturally hampered the process of modernization, whose drastic consequence was that the monarchical states became unable to effectively counter the external threat. In the case of Russia, military defeat so weakened the state that it became unable to suppress popular uprisings. In France and China, the opposition of the landed nobility to reforms internally weakened the monarchical state to the point that it could no longer deal effectively with the wide discontents generated by the postponement of necessary reforms. To quote Skocpol, in the three countries, monarchical states

either were dissolved through the impact of defeat in total war with more developed powers (i.e., Russia) or were deposed at home through the reaction of politically powerful landed upper classes against monarchical attempts to mobilize resources or impose reforms (i.e., France and China).⁴²

In thus undermining the ideological legitimacy and the repressive power of the monarchical state, the landed nobility in the three countries unintentionally created a condition favoring its own demise. Hardly could states so weakened by internal dissensions and conflicts, as well as by external reversals, suppress the popular discontents, which were only waiting to explode.

For Skocpol, social blockage explains revolution, but the source of the blockage is the nobility acting against the reformist project of its own state. The blockage and the internal sabotage of the nobility weaken the state, which then becomes vulnerable both to external attacks and popular assaults. With the state unable to quell social uprisings, the situation of the nobility becomes extremely precarious. In this way, Skocpol validates her main thesis: revolution is an unintended product of the landed nobility's obstruction, less so the realization of a project of revolutionary groups or aspiring classes. The emphasis on structural causes drastically diminishes the primacy that many scholars give to ideological beliefs in their study of the causes of revolutions.

As pointed out in the beginning of this study, the case of Ethiopia exhibits characteristics defying Skocpol's analyses. The Ethiopian regime was not overthrown subsequent to a military defeat; nor was it internally undermined because it attempted to impose reforms. Unlike Russia and China, the need to compete against powerful states did not pressure the state to modernize. True, the fear of colonization initially imparted the resolution to seek modern means; however, the end of the Second World War introduced a different situation. Far from being threatened, Ethiopia and its imperial regime enjoyed the full and manifold support of Western countries, especially of the U.S. government. In direct contrast to the case of Russia and China, the end of the colonial threat and the estab-

lishment of the Cold War turned Western countries into strong allies of imperial Ethiopia.

Whereas the case of France, Russia, and China shows monarchical states contested on account of their reformist agenda, the Ethiopian case, as we saw, displayed an autocratic state guaranteeing the status quo by protecting the nobility against the dangers of modernization. In Ethiopia, the blockage was due to the nobility and the imperial state acting in concert. Except for the prewar period, never did the imperial state find itself at odds with the nobility. Consequently, the regime was overthrown not because of its reformist agenda, but because it refused necessary reforms. When under the pressure of popular unrests it finally agreed to reform, it was too late, as revolutionary forces had already the upper hand.

Against Skocpol's thesis, the case of Ethiopia reinstates the importance of ideology by highlighting both the impact of legitimacy and the role of revolutionary groups. The Ethiopian Revolution displays the clear case of a regime being overthrown because of the disaffection of those who were supposed to defend it. Moreover, the fight was between modernized sectors and reactionary forces, whose main protector was the imperial state. One cannot attribute the weakness of the state to internal conflicts, which were very minor, at least until the explosion of barrack mutinies and social protests (more on this issue in the next chapter). If soldiers refused to shoot on protesting crowds, it was not so much because the state was divided as because the regime lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the military, especially in the eyes of young officers and noncommissioned officers.

The Loss of Legitimacy

In the absence of military defeat or serious internal dissensions, what else could most plausibly explain the paralysis of the repressive machine of the state but the loss of legitimacy? Here fully transpires the relevance of the functionalist approach to the Ethiopian case. As stated in Chapter 2, for Chalmers Johnson, the loss of authority is the prime condition of revolution, obvious as it is that the state cannot be overthrown so long as it can rely on the obedience of the armed forces. For Skocpol, too, the breakdown of the state occurs only when it loses the control of its own military force, which, however, she exclusively attributes to structural causes. But the Ethiopian Revolution displayed none of the structural causes that Skocpol enumerates: what caused the breakdown of the state was rather the loss of allegiance among the military. The important factor here is that the loss resulted more from an ideological process of delegitimization than from defeat in war or internal divisions.

A functionalist analysis of Haile Selassie's downfall first establishes the value system of the imperial regime, that is, the ideas by which the regime defined itself and on the basis of which people formulated expectations. We saw in the preceding chapters that Haile Selassie rose to power through the promise of

modernization at a time when Ethiopia, encircled by colonial forces, could no longer continue to trust the conservative discourse of the anti-modernist section of the nobility. In the face of the staunch resistance of anti-modernist forces, Haile Selassie underlined the need for a central government strong enough to impose modernization. Centralization, the creation of a bureaucratic system of government, and the establishment of a professional army gave Haile Selassie the means to achieve supremacy over the traditional nobility. However, once supremacy was achieved, he followed a path that was little supportive of modernization. Instead of intensifying and deepening modernizing reforms, Haile Selassie shifted toward the establishment and consolidation of a system of solitary and autocratic exercise of power. In exchange for the landed nobility supporting absolutism, he pledged to protect its interests and privileges.

A system based on this kind of consensus could work only so long as the emperor was able to maintain the persona of a modernizer. But as it became clear that the imperial protection of outdated privileges was blocking the modernization of the country, growing elements in the modern sector, especially students, intellectuals, and some members in the armed forces, began to voice opposition. The desertion signified the loss of legitimacy owing to a perceived discrepancy between the modernizing discourse of the state and the actual social reality. The Ethiopian case thus directly reflected Johnson's view of revolutionary situation as caused by a growing discrepancy between the ideological system and the social reality. As Skocpol herself comments: for Johnson, the possibility of revolution occurs

whenever values and environment become seriously "dis-synchronized," due to either external or internal intrusions—especially of new values or technologies. Once dis-synchronization sets in, people in the society become disoriented, and hence open to conversion to the alternative values proposed by a revolutionary movement. As this happens, existing authorities lose their legitimacy and have to rely more and more upon coercion to maintain order. Yet they can do this successfully only for a while.⁴³

The first denunciation of discrepancy occurred when the Imperial Guard attempted a coup in 1960. The rebels deplored the lack of modernization of the country and pointed out the contradiction between the modernizing discourse of the emperor and the protection of privileges. Consider the issue of land reform: it had a huge repercussion because it showed a glaring conflict between the value system and the social reality. One defining feature of Haile Selassie's regime was its commitment to nation-building through the integration and equal treatment of the various ethnic groups. This ideology of national integration conflicted with the preservation of tenancy in the south and the overwhelming dominance of Amhara elite, especially of the Showa region, in all sectors of social life. The disparity between the social structure and the ideological discourse explains the progressive disenchantment of many educated people from Tigray, Eritrea, and southern regions with the imperial system and their gradual conversion to ethnonationalism.

The loss of legitimacy resulting from a perceived discrepancy between the official discourse and the actual performance means that the regime is measured, not against an ideal standard, but against its own promises. The discrepancy presents the regime as inconsistent, deceptive, and even cynical. The importance of legitimacy stands out clearly when a sudden military or economic crisis strikes the society. Though causes outside the control of the government often trigger such crises, people blame the government. Even if a natural disaster or the international context is responsible for, say, an inflationary crisis, people reject the government's explanation because they no longer feel the weight of its authority. Thus, most Ethiopians blamed the imperial government for the 1973 dramatic rise of prices, even though it was a consequence of the OPEC decision to quadruple the price of oil. They interpreted the rise of prices as a cynical excuse to extort even more money from the people. If the same crisis had happened ten years ago, most Ethiopians would have accepted the explanation of the government. In other words, one fatal fallout of the loss of authority is the breakdown of trust between the state and the people.

A well-versed scholar, Jack A. Goldstone, misses the issue at stake when he responds to his critics thus:

I am puzzled by scholars who claim to make progress in explaining revolutions simply by saying that regimes perish when they lose "legitimacy." When pressed to explain what *caused* the loss of legitimacy, they often fall back upon the same factors—economic failures, alienation of elites, corruption, administrative efficiency—that I have cited in explaining revolutions.⁴⁴

Goldstone overlooks that the important factor lies, not in the occurrence of crises, which are frequent, but in the way people react to them. Any crisis, however severe, does not lead to rebellion. Only when people no longer have confidence in the goodwill of the government do crises cause uprisings. Without the loss of legitimacy, such crises would at best trigger protests and demonstrations, which are still appeals rather than insurrections.

Take the case of military defeat. When defeat is directly attributed to the military superiority of the enemy or to some adverse causes, it does not provoke insurrection. But if it is construed as a consequence of corruption, incapacity, or mistake, the state is directly blamed and often uprising follows. Thus, the Italian victory over Ethiopia in the 1935-36 war could have no insurrectional outcome because of the acknowledged fact that there was little that the Ethiopian state could do against the crushing material superiority of the Italian army. Examples abound of regimes that survived after a military defeat because of the conviction that everything possible was done. For instance, Arab states did not collapse subsequent to their military defeats against Israel. Defeat becomes fatal only in a context where legitimacy is already undermined: where ideological disenchantment has taken root, the addition of "failure in war drastically lowers the legitimacy of government," with the consequence that uprising becomes inevitable.⁴⁵

Theoretically speaking, Goldstone fails to see the importance of the synchronization between the ideological component and the political system. Were we to attribute revolutionary uprisings exclusively to the social failure of a regime, we would have hard time explaining why people tolerate political systems for a long time. Uprisings should have been perpetual, as no government has ever implemented an ideal policy. The social system acquires stability or functions as a system because the synchronization of the political system and the ideological component shapes the expectations of people. So long as the two components are in sync, policy decisions and implementations will find appropriate justifications, even if they do not promote popular interests. However, if divergence occurs between the framework of justification and the policy, the outcome is loss of legitimacy. As though the revelation of divergence had lifted the veil, people start to see and resent the wretched conditions of their life.

As Johnson notes, the loss of legitimacy has the characteristic effect of forcing the monarch to rely more and more on the armed forces. The lower authority sinks, the greater becomes the need to use force. This happened in Ethiopia: the use of force saved the regime in 1960, but it also turned military force into the major, if not the only, pillar of the regime. In thus promoting the political importance of the armed forces, the increasing use of force made the emperor exclusively dependent on the loyalty of the military. Such dependence made the regime precarious: any sign of discontent in the armed forces could not but embolden social protests. Aware of his dependence, Haile Selassie tried to buy the loyalty of the military through special treatments: he thus favorably responded each time they demanded wage increases and gave lavish material gifts to his generals. Instead of guaranteeing their loyalty, such special treatments simply enhanced the military's awareness of their power and political importance. Though Haile Selassie successfully avoided another coup thanks to a tight system of control and an effective policy of divide and rule, it was clear that the regime was at the mercy of an incident.

The unique merit of the functionalist approach is this ability to explain the sudden collapse of the imperial regime in Ethiopia. No military force was used to destroy the regime; nor were there lasting and stubborn demonstrations against it. It collapsed because the forces designed for its protection were no longer willing to defend it. It crumbled less because it was vigorously pushed out than because it had lost authority over its own guardians. The next chapter will closely analyze how the impact of precipitating factors totally wiped out whatever was left of the legitimacy of the monarchical rule.

Notes

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5. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, 54.
6. Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville's Contributions to the Theory of Revolution," in *Revolution: Nomos VIII*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Atherton Press, 1967), 107.
7. Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization—Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1999). Especially see Chapter Three.
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The Collapse of the Imperial Regime and the Political Assent of the Military

The structural contradictions of Haile Selassie's regime, however acute they may have been, would not have led to its overthrow in the time and manner it happened without the intervention of precipitating factors. The society would have probably stomached these contradictions a few more years "if conjunctural factors, each affecting the others, had not triggered off a crisis that was made insoluble by the weakness and divisions of the authorities, thus opening up a vacuum that the army was to fill in the end."¹ Chief among these precipitating factors was a sharp deterioration of the conditions of life, especially in urban centers, due to a severe inflationary pressure.

Structural Causes and Accelerators

Theoreticians of revolution often underline the distinction between structural causes and accelerators. Structural factors refer to the deep-seated and enduring causes of revolutions; accelerators are immediate precipitating events. They are "those events that are apparently the most closely associated with the outbreak of revolution. These 'accelerators' are the 'final, or immediate, causes of revolution.' They are discrete events, and they occur at specific points in time."² The structural causes stem from the lack of reforms of social systems based on chronic inequality and exploitation and on rigid and outdated socio-political structures, both highly propitious to the build-up of popular discontent and elite conflicts. Accelerators are those immediate causes whose major effect is to propel structural contradictions to a boiling point. Among the accelerators we find military defeat, sudden economic crisis due to a natural disaster or to a severe economic setback, explosion of sharp conflicts within the ruling class, etc.

Speaking of the English, French, American, and Russian Revolutions, Crane Brinton writes: "the years preceding the outbreak of revolution witnessed unusually serious economic, or at least financial, difficulties of a special kind."³ Wherever a grave and sudden economic setback occurs, the resulting financial crisis forces the government to take rapid measures to overcome the crisis. The usual response of a government is to raise new taxes or attempt reforms that cause discontents. The addition of unpopular measures to an already detested situation has an explosive impact that usually translates into demonstrations and riots, which can quickly evolve into a revolutionary uprising.

The structural factors indicate not only why a regime is overthrown, but also why it became vulnerable to accelerating factors. Circumstantial setbacks can paralyze only a regime that long-standing contradictions have weakened. Military defeat is fatal for a government already undermined by deep internal conflicts, whereas a more liked government would benefit from the indulgence of the people. Likewise, where there is a continuous discontent over economic performance, people are less willing to accept the usual explanation attributing the sudden crisis to uncontrollable forces. As previously mentioned, they blame the government, even if a natural disaster is responsible for the economic crisis. Since accelerators are thus precipitating a disintegration that has started quite a while ago, they must not be viewed simply as accidents or unfortunate mishaps: their impact originates from the fact that they operate in a social condition already deteriorating under structural contradictions.

Crises amidst Disenchantment

As already indicated, the inflationary trend that severely affected conditions of life in Ethiopia, notably in urban areas, was a direct consequence of the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result of both the closing of the Suez Canal and OPEC's decision to quadruple the price of oil, the price of imported goods rose dramatically in Ethiopia, thereby also adversely affecting the export of goods. Though the inflationary tendency had already angered merchants and consumers alike, the government "raised the local cost of petrol by fifty per cent—a very significant increase."⁴ The decision was necessary to alleviate the government's financial crisis caused by the purchase of expensive oil. The new price of oil provoked a strike of taxi drivers in Addis Ababa. Other sectors soon followed, and "on February 18, 1974 students joined taxi drivers, teachers, the unemployed and others in the street of the capital."⁵ The movement further expanded when factory workers and government employees in and around Addis Ababa associated with the protest.

Be it noted that the student protest was no longer confined to university students; it had expanded to high school students as well. In addition to broadening considerably the size of the protest, the involvement of high school students imparted a new direction to the student movement. It became more effective, essentially because

high school students, in contrast to their university colleagues, combined demands for general reform with the day-to-day problems of ordinary people, such as the price rise of cereals and butter, increase in bus fares, and access of the sons and daughters of the poor to the university.⁶

In thus echoing closely the preoccupations of ordinary people rather than simply vociferating the slogans of a radical ideology, the student protest concretely connected with the popular unrest and took its lead. The denunciation of price increases rallied more ordinary people to the protest; it even deactivated the repressive forces, since during the demonstration of high school students against rising prices, "for once the police did not interfere. Themselves victims of the price rises, they stood passively."⁷

The widening protests obtained some results: the government lowered the price of cereals and bus fares; it also revised and reduced the price of oil by ten cents. But far from abating, the protest intensified as more and more workers joined the movement. Still, however widespread the civilian protest had become, it would not have been a serious threat to the regime, were it not for the fact that protest had also spread in the armed forces. The deterioration of conditions of life following the price increase of oil had multiplied discontents among the rank and file of the armed forces. In particular, conditions in the barracks had become so appalling that "two disgruntled contingents of the Fourth Army Division in the town of Negale and Dolo . . . mutinied on 12 January 1974."⁸ The army general sent to negotiate with the mutineers was detained and forced to drink the non-potable water that the troops were drinking.

The government had no other option than to capitulate: it promised to improve living conditions in the barracks as well as to increase salaries, pensions, and other benefits. Here again, the concessions of the government only led to new demands. As a matter of fact, the Negale mutiny created a chain reaction in the armed forces. "The Second Division in Asmera . . . mutinied on 26 February, arrested the commander, other senior officers . . . and took over the radio station of the city."⁹ Going beyond corporate demands, the rebels put forward political requests, such as "freedom to form political parties, democratic election of provincial administrators, enforcement of price control regulations, [and] land reform."¹⁰

The spreading protest of soldiers and NCOs and its convergence with the civilian unrest confirm that "a common cause underlay civilian and military protest and that the cause was largely economic in nature."¹¹ It is also certain that the civilian unrest grew and amplified because it became increasingly clear that neither the army nor the policy was eager to defend the regime. In the same line, young officers, who up to now were apprehensive, were more and more drawn into the protest as they ascertained the rebellious mood of ordinary soldiers and NCOs.

Granted that the discontent was economic in nature, it must not be overlooked that it rapidly spread and developed into a rebellious movement because it occurred in a social context in which the loss of legitimacy had already undermined the state. Especially, the rapid spread of an insurrectional attitude

among the military would be unthinkable without the background of increasing disenchantment with the regime. In arresting and forcing the emperor's messenger to drink non-potable water, soldiers were clearly stating not only their contempt for senior officers but also their liberation from imperial awe.

Nothing was more conducive to a sharp deterioration of the imperial authority than the manner the government handled the 1972-73 severe famine in the Wollo province and in some parts of Tigray. Though a natural drought caused the disaster, the government's attempt to cover up the famine infuriated a growing number of people. As usual, students took the initial step of exposing the attempted cover-up and used it as a proof of the complete insensitivity of the regime to the plight of the people. They also denounced the vanity of the government, which chose to let an estimated 50,000 people die rather than admit the famine for fear of a loss of prestige on the international scene. Such vanity was so sickening that it gave students a good opportunity to hit at the heart of the regime by exposing the personal indifference of the emperor to the Ethiopian people. To give a maximum publicity to their denunciation, "the university students decided to forego their breakfast in an attempt to send the savings to the areas affected by the famine."¹²

Prior to the famine, the Ministry of Education had provided another factor of erosion of the authority of the government. In 1971, the Ministry made public its plan to reorganize education in Ethiopia in a document known as "The Education Sector Review." The document provoked outcries: teachers, soon joined by university students, led the protest and "demonstrated demanding the suspension of the Education Sector Review."¹³ Based on the recognition that the sluggish economy could not absorb the growing number of graduates from the educational institutes of the country, the plan proposed nothing less than a reduction of enrollment. In effect, "the primary level was to become the terminal level of education for most young people. Secondary education, rather than expanding, would remain at the current level, and university education would grow only slightly."¹⁴ Moreover, the proposal recommended a system of payment for higher education and predicted that "by 1990-2000 a major portion of the cost of higher education would be transferred to the students."¹⁵

Though the proposal contained some positive recommendations, such as the emphasis on practical education—as opposed to purely academic teaching—through the expansion of technical education, it stirred a generalized indignation. For most people, the plan contained none other than an attempt to block the path of higher education to students of poor families. To understand the tremendous impact of this interpretation on the legitimacy of the government, one must recall that Haile Selassie had built his reputation of modernizer as a strong advocate of the expansion of modern education in Ethiopia. The new proposal could not but strike as a drastic reversal of the very policy that Haile Selassie used to extol his regime. In the face of mounting opposition, the government capitulated: it announced the suspension of the Sector Review and promised a salary increase to teachers. What transpired here is unmistakable: though the

need for serious reforms was generally acknowledged, the government could not sell its proposal because of the erosion of its authority. If such a proposal had been made ten years ago, it would have been probably much less contested.

Senility and Conflicts within the Ruling Elite

Many authors have included senility as one of the precipitating factors for Haile Selassie's downfall. For instance, Andargachew Tiruneh adds senility as a credible explanation when he writes that in face of mounting civilian and military protests Haile Selassie "had become too old and senile to employ even his old skills effectively."¹⁶ The old age of the emperor impacted on political developments in two ways. First, it deprived the emperor of the necessary strength to vigorously defending his regime. Second, with the designated heir being incapacitated by a stroke, it created uncertainty that encouraged factional conflicts within the ruling class.

One common characteristic of successful revolutions is that they happened in countries under mediocre kings. Charles I, Louis XVI, and Nicholas II shared the common attribute of being "poor kings," and as such were "wholly unable to make effective use of force, even had they possessed it."¹⁷ The same cannot be said about Haile Selassie, who was reputed for his shrewdness, ruthlessness, and absolute love of power. Nonetheless, the rule holds inasmuch as old age can be said to have reduced him to the level of a poor king. Many of his decisions, more exactly hesitations during the military and civilian unrests, were so uncharacteristic of his temperament that they manifested a clear reduction of his abilities owing to ageing. Old age was to Haile Selassie what cancer was to the Shah of Iran. Enumerating the reasons why rebellion succeeded in Iran, one author says, "because of the shah's cancer, these protests met with a tolerance that would have been unthinkable a few years before."¹⁸ Just as a healthier shah would have been more decisive, so too a younger Haile Selassie would have been more determined and combative, perhaps to the point of changing the course of events.

To the biological drawback was added an impediment characteristic of autocratic regimes. Unlike political systems based on the workings of institutions, an autocratic regime becomes paralyzed when the leader is incapacitated. Since the autocrat ruler decides everything, his entourage is unable to make the necessary decisions, even when circumstances require them, if the ruler dies or is unable to command. Essentially composed of sycophants, the entourage has long lost the disposition to cope with new situations, accustomed as it had become to obeying rather than taking initiatives.

Haile Selassie's hesitations in dealing with military and civilian unrests had undoubtedly crippled the top echelon of the government, leading to the breakdown of the state, especially of the military chain of command. The crippling effect of Haile Selassie's hesitations was further amplified by the divide and rule method that he used to control his entourage. When the leader is no longer able to take the necessary decisions, the mutual distrust reigning among his associ-

ates make them unable to take initiatives, still less to reach a consensus on a course of action. The very mode of functioning of autocratic rule requires the gathering of incompetent, divided, and obedient people so that the whole machinery is paralyzed when something bad happens to the autocrat.

Another impact of the emperor's old age was to induce a wait-and-see attitude among many people, especially among reformist groups. Asked about the passivity of the reformist faction, one member admitted that

his generation could have put Ethiopia on the track of evolution rather than that of revolution. But for this, one should have acted before instead of discussing on "the after-Haile Selassie." The necessary risk should have been taken to control the situation while the emperor was still alive rather than to adapt oneself to a situation of end of reign.¹⁹

In other words, instead of waiting for the death of the emperor and hoping for the better, the reformist camp should have taken the initiative of preparing the post-Haile Selassie period. The observation is pertinent, since the adopted state of expectation certainly made the reformist camp passive. Relying on the fact that the emperor was old and that change was inevitable, it came to the faulty conclusion of not provoking anything so as to let things unfold naturally.

When protests, demonstrations, and mutinies suddenly flared up, the reformists were so unprepared that they were taken aback. Rapidly overwhelmed by the fluidity of the situation, they became spectators rather than actors. Not so the camp of the revolutionaries, who by vocation and training are always ready to seize the occasion. Since unlike the reformists, revolutionaries were trying to provoke change, the demonstrations and strikes were welcomed news for them. Because they worked and hoped for such upheavals, they jumped at the opportunity and quickly assumed the leadership of the protests, thereby sidelining the reformists.

Just as with the reformists, the sudden outburst of social unrests caused disarray among the conservative members of the ruling class, all the more easily since uncertainty had already set in when "the massive stroke suffered by the Crown Prince left him virtually paralyzed for much of 1973."²⁰ Both the atmosphere of uncertainty about imperial succession and the indecisions caused by the emperor's senility intensified divisions at the highest echelon of the state and unleashed personal ambitions and power intrigues. This situation of "power struggle going on in the twilight of the Emperor's long rule" particularly aggravated the old conflict between the aristocrats and the top bureaucrats of the regime.²¹ Confronted with mounting unrests, the aristocratic camp, led by Ras Asrate Kassa and Princess Tenagne Work, defended a conservative policy and advocated a repressive response. Contrarily, the camp of the bureaucrats favored the implementation of some reforms; it was led by Aklilu Habte Wold, then prime minister, and some influential members of his cabinet, such as Yilma Deressa.

As the aristocratic group considered the Aklilu faction as a "bunch of parvenu," it saw the crisis as an opportunity to sideline the bureaucrats and regain power.²² Unsurprisingly, the group put the blame for the ongoing social unrest on the prime minister and his clique. It won a decisive victory when the Aklilu cabinet resigned on February 26, 1974. The fall of Aklilu left "the 82-year-old emperor a captive of his wily feudal kinsmen, Asrate Kassa and other courtiers, who sought to use the occasion to retrieve power lost to 'commoners.'"²³ Two days later, the emperor nominated a new cabinet: led by the aristocrat Endalkachew Makonnen, it "consisted of members of the landed aristocracy and of people with ties to the leading families of the traditional nobility at the expense of the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' of commoner background."²⁴ A similar purge took place in the armed forces with General Abiye Abebe, the emperor's son-in-law, serving as defense minister.

Weakened Government

The promotion of one faction to the detriment of another faction underlines how serious the divisions within the ruling class had become in the last days of Haile Selassie's rule. V. I. Lenin and many other theoreticians of revolution have familiarized us with the idea that the appearance of cleavages within the ruling class is one of the conditions of successful revolutionary uprisings. As one such theoretician puts it, "revolution frequently reaches its climatic stage in a period marked not by rigid, unyielding absolutism, but by concessions, divisions, and indecision on the part of those in power."²⁵ Disagreements over how to resolve the ongoing crisis and rivalries between factions have the characteristic effect of creating confusion and indecision, the major consequence of which is the weakening of the government and its repressive apparatus. This kind of internal fragmentation is a "visible symbol of declining government competence and is likely to lower the regime's legitimacy in the minds of citizens."²⁶

The idea that revolutionary movements owe their victory less to the strength of the revolutionaries than to the weakness of contested states has been verified time and again. In his study of the Russian Revolution, Louis Gottschalk shows how the situation of opposition forces was similar in 1905 and 1917:

The same parties existed in 1905 and promoted nearly as high a degree of solidified public opinion as in 1917; they had the same programs—Constitutional, Revolutionary Socialist, Menshevik, and Bolshevik. They had the same leaders—Milyukov, Kerensky, Trotsky, Lenin.²⁷

The reason why the Revolution succeeded in 1917 is to be found nowhere else but in the considerable weakening of the state as a result of military defeat. The same was true of the French Revolution. Various uprisings against Louis XV failed, but one succeeded against Louis XVI in 1789 because "Louis XV had the support of the army, the clergy, and a great number of the nobility and therefore was able to maintain himself against practically the same kind of revolutionary

spirit as that of 1789."²⁸ By contrast, Louis XVI had neither a united nobility and clergy on his side nor the support of a unified army.

Besides internal divisions, the very attempt to make reforms has been shown to encourage revolutionary uprisings. As we saw with Alexis de Tocqueville, the decision to reform is a dangerous moment for a government that has been postponing changes. When a regime is forced to grant concessions and undertake reforms, it exposes itself to more demands. Concessions extracted from the ruling elite after a bitter struggle whet the appetites of protesters; they also lead to the conclusion of a weak government, and so embolden the masses to ask for more. In addition, when a government takes up the very reforms that it has long refused to undertake, it further undermines its legitimacy by openly admitting that its protracted opposition was wrong. Reforms obtained by popular pressure often come too late: they further tarnish the regime instead of saving it.

These features of revolutionary situations were perfectly reflected in the last days of Haile Selassie. The split between aristocrats and bureaucrats and the subsequent sidelining of the bureaucrats testified to the internal divisions tearing the top of the machinery of the state. Actually, the axiom that the weakness of the state makes up the strength of revolutionaries found a perfect validation in Ethiopia. Revolutionary forces in Ethiopia were far from showing any strength: they had neither a clear leadership nor an organized form, be it among the military or the civilian population. Yet, though it faced an unorganized protest, which was moreover limited to urban areas, the imperial state crumbled. As Dessalegn Rahmeto notes, "the allegedly unassailable power of the monarchy and of the classes that it was claimed to represent, disintegrated in the face of what was only a fragmented opposition. . . . The state collapsed suddenly and without the least resistance."²⁹

In addition to internal splits, external factors other than the rise of oil prices have contributed to the weakening of the regime. As already indicated, the financial, military, and diplomatic support of Western countries was instrumental in the strengthening of the imperial regime since the end of the Italian invasion. Especially, the U.S. government has provided "the state with a source of external financial and military support [that] enabled the monarchy to prolong its existence beyond the time when it might otherwise have been able to survive."³⁰ The main reason for the sustained and profuse American support was "the Kagnew Communication Base which quartered over 3,000 of the 6,000 US military personnel in Ethiopia [and] served for tracking satellites, monitoring communication and allowing the US access to the Red Sea."³¹ However, the development of satellite communication made the Kagnew Base increasingly irrelevant, and so brought about the decline of the U.S. commitment to the imperial regime. This explains why the American government did not engage in any special action to save the regime when the oil crisis triggered mutinies and civilian unrests. Had the U.S. government been as eager as before to uphold the imperial regime, the overthrow of the latter would have become more arduous.

When the new cabinet promised reforms and demanded more time to prove its commitment, far from receding, protests intensified and even radicalized. The louder the new cabinet professed its reformist agenda, the less legitimate it appeared in the eyes of protesters. Unable to appease the social unrest, the new prime minister called upon the military, to his peril and that of his government, to help him establish law and order. With the open intervention of the armed forces, a new, more dramatic as well as tragic phase of the Revolution begins.

Characteristics of the Uprisings

Before discussing the critical role of the military, let us lay out the characteristics of the social movement that brought down the imperial regime. One point is quite clear: the 1974 uprising was the climax of a discontent that was accumulating for quite a long time, as shown by the 1960 attempted coup and the support it obtained, especially from the modern educated elite. The sharp deterioration of conditions of life as a result of the rise of oil prices had an explosive effect because it worsened a silent but already amplified discontent. In some regions, discontent had even reached the level of open confrontations, the most noticeable being the armed ethnic movements in Eritrea and Bale and the peasant rebellion in Gojjam.

Discontent had found expression in some literary works as well, especially on the pages of some novels. Consider the popularity of the novel *Alweledem (I Refuse to be Born)* written in the early 1960s by Ethiopian novelist, Abe Gubegna. The government banned the book and jailed the author for some time because the story of "a fetus that refused to come out of its mother's womb" seemed to suggest that conditions of life are so dreadful under the imperial regime that it is better not to be born at all.³² Mengistu Lemma, a poet and a novelist, provides another example of literary denunciation of Ethiopian society under the imperial rule. For example, *Yale Atcha Gabetach (The Marriage of Unequals)* is a drama exposing the conflictual situation resulting from "a marriage between an educated and well-to-do man to a woman from a humble family."³³ There is also the case Addis Alemayehu, who wrote the Ethiopian classic called *Fikre Iske Mekaber (Eternal Love)*, in which he "described the injustice the peasant faced and [his] conflicts with the feudal lords."³⁴ These literary expressions of discontent were largely read and the authors were considered as heroes because they defied the imperial social order. Nonetheless, most literary expressions, especially popular songs, were focused on entertainment and romantic stories, as though to provide an escape from the gruesome reality.

Another noticeable trait was that the discontent was general and across the board. It was not confined to a particular class; it included the working masses, but also all the sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, and even some segments of the ruling class. The inclusive nature of the discontent indicates how conditions favoring revolution were fully gathered. The repeated failure of movements confined to factional interests to translate into revolutionary uprisings confirms that "revolutionary movements do not succeed where only the workers are mobi-

lized, or only the peasants, or only the middle classes. They succeed only where a critical mass of most or all of the major classes in the society is mobilized in the revolutionary process."³⁵ The French Revolution became possible as a result of the bourgeoisie and a segment of the nobility joining the protests of peasants and urban workers. In Russia, too, the revolution would not have been successful without the liberal bourgeoisie and the progressive nobility siding with the popular protest.

Spontaneity was the other salient feature of the 1974 uprising. Even though conditions of life had become harder, the protest took everybody by surprise, including the imperial government, of course, but also the revolutionary groups themselves. It is fair to say that no group expected the uprising, let alone planning it. The strikes and the demonstrations occurred spontaneously if only because no organized movement liable to launch an appeal existed at the time. The spontaneous nature of the Ethiopian upheaval is in line with the movements that triggered revolution in France, Russia, and China. Without fully endorsing Theda Skocpol's statement, "revolutions are not made; they come," it must be admitted that the Ethiopian case is yet another validation of the unplanned character of revolutions.³⁶ My reservation comes from the conviction that a spontaneous movement, however large and intensive, becomes revolution only when revolutionary groups assume the leadership. Granted that uprisings are not the product of planning, I maintain with Lenin that neither are revolutionary movements possible without revolutionary leadership. In short, what the actions of revolutionary groups explain is not the revolt, but rather its transformation into a revolutionary movement.

The other and somewhat peculiar character of the Ethiopian social protest was, as already pointed out, its essentially urban nature. Underlining the absence of the peasantry, Bahru Zewde writes: the revolution "was essentially an urban phenomenon. Although later there was some agitation among the peasantry, the countryside remained relatively quiescent."³⁷ Like Bahru, many students of the Ethiopian Revolution note the relative aloofness of the peasantry, but none of them provides a satisfactory explanation. Yet the absence of widespread peasant uprisings raises a huge problem in view of the prevailing belief among theoreticians of revolution that "there is no revolution without the peasantry."³⁸ As noted in the beginning of the study, this unusual behavior of the Ethiopian peasantry constitutes a challenge to Skocpol's analysis, since she too maintains that one major condition of revolution is "widespread rebellions by the lower classes, most crucially peasants."³⁹

What drives theoreticians of revolution to emphasize the crucial role of peasant uprisings is the fact that revolutions have occurred in essentially transitional agrarian societies. In such societies, peasants still make up the bulk of the population and the conflict between the landed nobility and the peasantry constitutes the main social fracture as well as the major obstacle to modernization. Whether we take the case of France, Russia, or China, the revolutionary move-

ments essentially targeted the removal of the landed nobility consecutive to widespread peasant uprisings.

The Ethiopian case does not agree with this scenario. Though the peasantry represented the overwhelming laboring force and its conflicts with the landed nobility constituted the main social contradiction blocking modernization, the revolutionary movement in Ethiopia was essentially an urban affair. This trait was all the more surprising since, as reiterated in this study, land reform was the main issue that the imperial regime faced. The absence of active participation on the part of peasants did not, however, entail actions opposing the revolutionary movement. Though many revolutionaries had feared adverse reactions, Ethiopian peasants did absolutely nothing to prevent the collapse of the imperial regime. Still, given that their participation had been minimal, one must yield to the fact that the Ethiopian Revolution refutes the assumption that there cannot be an essentially urban revolution.

Peasant Discontent and Leadership

One explanation for the subdued participation of peasants comes immediately to mind, namely, the usual perception of peasants as being ignorant, fatalistic, and non-innovative. For many observers, Ethiopian peasants "have neither demanded nor been aware of the possibilities of reform."⁴⁰ This cultural explanation does not tell the whole story, however. Ethiopian history is not unfamiliar with peasants rising up against abusive landlords. Peasant uprisings have also occurred in recent times, as for instance in 1968, when Haile Selassie had to send the army in Gojjam against peasants who were refusing to pay taxes. More recently, the uprising of Tigray against the *Derg* had such high peasant participation that one author wrote a book titled *Peasant Revolution: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*.⁴¹ As to Ethiopian peasants' unwillingness to accept innovation, John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub reject it, for

whenever agricultural innovation has been initiated from above the Ethiopian peasant has shown a remarkable tendency to respond. A brief illustration of the peasant's willingness to respond to innovation and increase production is to be found in the experience of the large Swedish backed CADU project in southern Ethiopia.⁴²

That Ethiopian peasants welcomed and responded positively to the project is proof enough that they were open to innovation.

These facts do not settle the matter, since the lack of peasant militancy in Ethiopia is all the more surprising when we considered the extremely hard conditions of southern peasants. We have already indicated that peasants in the north and the south faced different conditions. While the land tenure system in the north (the *rist* system), guaranteed land ownership to laboring peasants, tenancy prevailed in the south as a result of expropriation by northern conquerors. On top of allowing a harsher form of exploitation, the southern system put laboring peasants under the control of lords who were ethnically alien to them. Sure-

ly, while the lack of peasant militancy in the north is somewhat explainable, it is perplexing when we consider the conditions of southern peasants.

The protection against landlessness that the *rist* system provided can be reason enough for northern peasants not to want to change it. In effect, the fear that the new tax system was a threat to ownership based on *rist* triggered the peasant rebellion in Gojjam. To institute a better and more accurate tax collection, the government required each peasant to register the land in his name. To the extent that the requirement privatized ownership, it was clearly undermining the system of tenure based on descent. Hence the reaction of the peasants: they "refused to pay the tax claiming they owned no land since the original owner died centuries ago."⁴³ By contrast, the southern system contained nothing that peasants would want to defend: both the loss of land and cultural subjugation should have, therefore, incited perpetual peasant unrests.

It would be wrong to assume that no peasant rebellion ever took place in the south. Here and there, peasant uprisings have broken out, as in "the Darasa incident in Sidamo in 1960 or the endemic banditry known as 'shifta'; early in 1970, for instance, a bandit leader named Waqo carried out guerrilla operations in the Sidamo hills, though he surrendered later in the year."⁴⁴ Notably, rebellions were frequent in the early years of the southern conquest. To cite one representative case, "anti-Amhara rebellions and [a] state of lawlessness," which were subdued only through a direct military occupation, defined the Wollega region between 1909 and 1918.⁴⁵

Such cases of open rebellion remained exceptional, and so do not alter the general picture of resigned peasants. Since the explanation by fatalism and ignorance is little convincing, what else could account for the lack of widespread and persistent unrests in the south but the repressive power of the imperial state? Here again, the explanation does not fully agree with facts. Without denying the dissuasive impact of the imperial repressive power, we must also admit that southern Ethiopia nowhere approached a situation requiring a state of emergency. It never called for the constant mobilization of repressive forces; nor were there serious hindrances to the peaceful conduct of business and everyday life. Outside sporadic and limited protests,

southern Ethiopia has scarcely presented the appearance of an area of impending revolution held down with an iron hand. Some of it has been liable to sudden rebellion, but most has appeared to live with an acquiescence in government authority which may conceal a dull resentment at alien domination but which has not prevented the ordinary administration from carrying on in an orderly and for the most part fairly peaceful way.⁴⁶

Not even when the imperial state had collapsed during the Italian invasion and occupation did southern regions manifest a noticeable rebellious tendency. Yet was there a better opportunity for a generalized insurrection than the military defeat of the Ethiopian state?

If it is neither fatalism nor repression, what, then, explains the lack of a sustained insurrectional tendency among southern peasants? Two basic reasons working in combination seem to be responsible for the resignation of southern peasants. The first reason is, of course, the system of tenancy itself: for landless peasants, the slightest defiance carries the considerable risk of eviction. Whereas a worker can change job or move elsewhere, the loss of land offers no other alternative to the peasant than the prospect of starvation and begging, given that work on land is the only means of existence. Add to this deterrent the second reason, to wit, the inevitable competition between tenants: the eviction of one tenant offers the neighboring tenant the possibility of expanding his lease, or the landless peasant the opportunity of acquiring one. This competition creates mutual suspicion and isolation, and so makes the emergence of horizontal solidarity among peasants difficult. In other words, the rationale behind the alleged apathy of the peasantry is that defiance is too perilous and difficult to organize. As one author puts it, "a cultivating class dependent on land is likely to be conservative, unable to organize collectively, and incapable of enforcing political solidarity. In short, it is politically incompetent."⁴⁷

Though tenancy is disabling, the fact remains that, as we saw, peasant uprisings have occurred in Ethiopia. Knowing under what conditions these uprisings took place can help us understand what other factors must be present for a rebellious situation to emerge. Let us reconsider the 1968 peasant rebellion in Gojjam. Studies show that Gojjami peasants rebelled and took up arms because the local elite joined the rebellion and provided the political leadership. What incited the local elite into rebellion was the imposition of an unpopular governor. The latter was kept in power even though "consistently and continually the elders of Gojjam have tried to put pressure on the Emperor to remove the Governor."⁴⁸

When a similar condition of convergence between elite discontent and popular protest occurred in Tigray, a widespread peasant rebellion took place there as well. Indeed, the massive revolt against the Derg would not have been possible without the political leadership of modern educated Tigreans. Interestingly, southern peasants, too, rebelled when local elites agreed to join their protests. A notable case was the uprising in Wollega. What started the movement was the imprisonment of a traditional chief, Jote Tullu. His son, Mardassa, agitated the peasants and took the leadership of the protest.⁴⁹ Clearly, every time that the local elite was in disagreement with the central government and determined to resist, peasant rebellions have erupted because the elite could make common cause with the peasants, thereby providing political leadership.

If one of the conditions of peasant rebellion is the provision of political leadership, then the subdued insurrectional tendency of southern peasants must be explained by the connivance of local elites with the imperial regime. Let us begin by stating that the northern conquest of the south had dismantled the existing tribal systems and introduced a class system into which many local traditional elites known as *balabats* were integrated. The integration was realized through the practice of reserving "one-third" of the conquered land "for local

leaders."⁵⁰ Naturally, the local elites defended their new-found class status by demanding that their own people recognize them as land owners. Not only did this defense mean that they acquired their own tenants, but also that they had common class interests with the conquerors and their state. As one author puts it, "the material reward given by the conquerors to the local political leaders (the *balabats*) in return for their cooperation was land of no mean size, which they utilized, together with their customary social position, in order to enrich themselves."⁵¹ These integrated elites would do nothing to encourage a peasant insurrection for the simple reason that the insurrection would undermine their land ownership and thus their class position. One reason for the lack of widespread peasant resistance in the south was, therefore, the system of integration of the imperial regime: inasmuch as class interest tied southern local elites with the northern ruling class, the imperial system was fairly successful in depriving southern peasants of the necessary leadership for a sustained and organized resistance.

So long as the possibility of integration and social mobility was present, notably through the acquisition of modern education, sons and daughters of local chiefs maintained their allegiance to the imperial state. But as the possibility progressively narrowed, many joined the growing urban opposition, some even espousing ethnonationalist ideologies. Even so, neither northern students and intellectuals nor the educated southern elite adopted an effective strategy blending their struggle with the rural population. Though many talked about creating guerrilla movements, in Eritrea alone rebellious elites put the talk into practice. Only after the fall of Haile Selassie's regime did Tigrean elites and others follow the Eritrean example. Cohen and Weintraub are absolutely right when they say that "political leaders in the urban areas did not reach out to the peasant. They romanticized him through slogans rather than involved or politicized him."⁵² Because without political leadership the insurrectional potential of the peasantry cannot materialize, the Ethiopian Revolution presented the peculiar character of not involving a massive peasant uprising. Only after the overthrow of the regime did Ethiopian peasants make their presence felt in the revolutionary process.

A note of caution: what is said here does not contradict my analysis of the imperial state as the defender of the southern land tenure system. Since local elites were integrated into the northern class system as subaltern forces, the integration could not remove resentment, and hence the possibility of rebellion. It is fair to maintain that, without the omnipresence of the imperial repressive forces, the cooptation of southern elites would have been less reliable. Moreover, while helpful to control peasants, local elites were powerless in case of peasant uprisings: having lost their traditional references, their own new social status required the protection of the imperial state.

Was a Reformist Outcome Possible?

The resignation of Aklilu cabinet under the pressure of military and civilian unrests cleared the way for new political developments. As we saw, Endalkachew formed a new cabinet and promised reforms. Nevertheless, undermined by continuous military unrests and civilian strikes and demonstrations, the new cabinet proved unable to establish law and order. At the request of the Derg, the emperor dismissed the new prime minister on July 22, 1974, and replaced him by Michael Imru, another aristocrat but with a liberal reputation. On September 11 of the same year, the Derg toppled the emperor and the new cabinet and finally assumed complete power. This *coup d'état* became the prelude to a series of radical measures that will completely transform the country and push it into the path of socialism. Before studying the radical phase of the Derg, it is interesting to know whether a reformist outcome that would have avoided the Derg and the subsequent socialist venture was possible, if only because it brings out the impact of the radical ideology of the Derg and other groups on the direction of the country.

In thus raising the possibility of alternative outcomes, we simply admit the following:

There was a great deal of difference between the fall of an autocracy, leading possibly to the establishment of a liberal republic, and the entrenchment of a new regime claiming to be socialist: it is the difference which separates reform from revolution.⁵³

Protests against imperial autocracy should have normally entailed the fall of the autocrat, unless the latter managed to retake control of the situation, notably by recapturing his authority over the armed forces. Since Haile Selassie was not able to regain the upper hand, one possible outcome was the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and the formation of a liberal government. An even more likely outcome was the rise of a military regime through a classic military coup fomented by senior officers. None of these possible outcomes would have engaged the country in a revolutionary path.

The discussion over the possibility of reformism must tackle the question of knowing whether the collapse of the Endalkachew cabinet was inevitable. For those scholars who maintain that revolution was unavoidable, the failure of Endalkachew was predictable. Their main argument is that the reformist promises of the new cabinet were anything but real. Witness: though the new cabinet was composed of educated ministers, most of them "came from Addis Abeba or Shewa and had connections to the crown, the aristocracy or to the landed gentry. They represented neither the empire's heterogeneity nor the aspirations of the soldiers."⁵⁴ Given the predominantly aristocratic composition of the new the cabinet, civilian and military protesters had good reasons to be suspicious of its reformist commitment.

Without a credible reformist alternative, what was left but the revolutionary option? For Addis Hiwet, there was no liberal option for the simple reason that Haile Selassie's long repressive rule had emptied the country of liberal elements. That is why the new cabinet was filled with people with aristocratic ties. He writes, "the lifeless death of liberal political vocation had left the Constituency political scene most propitious for left politics, the latter confronted no non-left political movement of consequence among the forces active on the political scene."⁵⁵ John Markakis and Nega Ayele share Addis's view when they write: the imperial regime's "demise was not the result of a bourgeois revolution. In fact, the chances of a bourgeois succession in the classic manner were buried along with the *ancien regime*."⁵⁶

The Ethiopian student movement went further and posited the inevitability of a revolutionary direction by arguing that the contradictions of Ethiopia were so entrenched and explosive, especially as regards land reform and the national question, that reformism was hardly relevant. Thus, in a special issue, the Ethiopian Students Union in North America notes fundamental shortcomings in the reformist agenda of Endalkachew and his cabinet. "They did not even promise land reform as they did promise a new constitution, etc. Thus the key problem of the country is brushed aside," said the student union.⁵⁷ The other major omission was the ethnic issue, obvious as it is that "the cry for equality and self-determination of various nationalities will not be solved under the framework of a ruling class of the landlord-bureaucratic type."⁵⁸

For the student movement, reformism was incapable of solving the basic contradiction of modern Ethiopia: the recognition of bourgeois individual rights did not guarantee the removal of Amhara domination over other ethnic groups. Because of this domination, not only revolution but the socialist type of revolution is inevitable, for "the national question cannot be solved apart from revolution and class struggle; it must be handled as a component part of the national democratic/socialist revolution."⁵⁹ Only through the protection of group rights and the removal of class society can true equality among ethnic groups be achieved. Unity based on the common interests of working people, and that alone, can create the condition of genuine ethnic equality. Unity construed around the common interests of exploiting elites presupposes hierarchical inequality, and so would only be a reshuffling of the imperial order.

For all those arguing that revolution was ineluctable, the absence of a liberal alternative gave leftist forces an unprecedented opportunity to seize power. Unfortunately, two adverse factors squandered the opportunity: (1) divisions within the left resulting in the appearance of opposing groups, the two most important being the MEISON and the EPRP; and (2) the emergence of the Derg, which represented, according to some Marxist scholars, a counterrevolutionary force. Both the bitter and bloody struggle among leftist groups and the counterrevolutionary offensive of the Derg prevented leftist forces from seizing power.

Against the idea that revolution was inevitable, I argue that such a conclusion is heavily dependent on the Leninist idea that the era of imperialism has

made bourgeois reformism obsolete. The conclusion suffers from distortions imparted by the global hegemony of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the 1960s and 1970s. Had the social uprising occurred in the 90s, nobody would have talked of the inevitability of a socialist revolution in Ethiopia, even though the contradictions would have been the same. Clearly, reformism appeared irrelevant or impossible not so much because of the nature of the social conflicts, but because of ideologically inspired reading of the social development of Third World countries.

Another fact refractory to the idea of the inevitability of revolution points to the highly exaggerated account of the strength of leftist forces in Ethiopia. To suggest that leftist forces were strong enough to direct the country toward a revolutionary course is not a defensible statement. True, leftist groups were quite visible and most vociferous, but this does not mean that the entire student population (even if the majority appeared radicalized), the intelligentsia, the teaching profession, labor unions, and the bureaucracy had converted to socialism. The fact that people participated in demonstrations organized by leftist groups does not entail that they shared their ideological convictions. Moreover, as already indicated, one of the characteristics of the Ethiopian social uprising was that no organized parties existed when it exploded. Though people with leftist convictions infiltrated various sectors, they were scattered and devoid of organizational unity. Leftist political parties per se emerged after the fall of the imperial regime. As in other countries, the Ethiopian left was an active and committed minority with, however, the important particularity that in Ethiopia it did not even yet have an organized existence. Under such a condition, it is not feasible to argue that revolution was inevitable; it is even less feasible to suppose that the revolution would have occurred without the ad hoc intervention of the Derg whose conversion to socialism was anything but predictable.

Scholars tying the occurrence of revolution to the rise of the Derg precisely emphasize the weakness of the Ethiopian left as well as the lack of radical demands on the part of the majority of protesters. In so doing, they present the revolutionary orientation as an outcome of a military *coup d'état*, with the consequence that it has been imposed on the country. Accordingly, "the formation of the Derg is the most significant and at the same time the most obscure event of the turbulent developments of 1974."⁶⁰ For instance, Paul Henze argues that the civilian left was too isolated and weak to initiate a revolution. Though social problems existed and the emperor did not show any reformist will, "there was nothing in the gradual changes that were occurring in Haile Selassie's relationship to the awesome responsibilities he insisted on retaining that made the revolution of 1974, and in particular the course it took, inevitable."⁶¹

Henze finds that there was nothing that was highly threatening to the regime at that time. Secessionist movements were either defeated or under control. Economic development was slow, but not liable to bring about widespread discontent. Even the dramatic rise of the price of oil could not be described as having had anything more than "an unsettling psychological effect."⁶² The response of the emperor to demonstrations and mutinies triggered by the price of oil was

appropriate, since he fired the contested prime minister and "appointed a progressive aristocrat, Indalkachew Makonnen, in his place."⁶³ As a result,

The population rejoiced in the expectation that the long expected transition to a more open political system would go smoothly and a liberalized government would be in place before Haile Selassie departed from the scene. Journalists started writing freely and political groupings began to form. There was no violence. Prospects for peaceful change in Ethiopia looked good.⁶⁴

This prospect of peaceful and gradual change was suddenly interrupted when in February 1974, "a group of lower-level officers . . . organized an armed forces coordinating committee."⁶⁵ Henze is convinced that the formation of the Derg, and with it, the rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam alone explain the revolutionary drift that led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the end of the reformist course. What killed reformism was neither the severity of the social problems nor the strength of leftist forces, but the military coup organized by disgruntled members of the armed forces.

In light of the weakness of the civilian left, Henze's position states one undeniable fact: the revolutionary direction was indeed unthinkable without the Derg. Similarly true is his observation that the social protests were far from presenting radical demands, as they focused on wage increases and elementary democratic rights, such as freedom of organization. All the same, Henze downplays the impact of the radical demands of students and intellectuals and the extent to which the imperial regime had lost popular support, especially among the urban population. The social protests caused by the rise of oil prices had more than psychological fallout for the simple reason that it exasperated an already diffused discontent. Notably, mutinies in the army for a regime that so heavily relied on repression have more than an unsettling psychological effect; they are fatal.

Even though students and intellectuals did not have the material power to lead a radical revolution, there is no denying that, without their anti-monarchial and anti-liberal agitation, the Derg would have not gone into the path of socialist revolution. Likewise, the popularity of the socialist ideology, which the Derg used to claim legitimacy, especially in the eyes of the soldiery, was the work of students and intellectuals. The radical atmosphere created by students was a stimulant for both the overthrow of the regime and the engagement into the path of socialist revolution. The hesitations of the Derg and its ideological divisions during the early days of its formation indicate that the continuation of the civilian unrests and the radical discourse of students and intellectuals were quite instrumental in ensuring the triumph of radical elements over moderate members within the Derg itself.

Why Did Reformism Fail?

The common sense position argues against the minimization of the impact of students and social protests, but does not lose sight of the primary role of the Derg in the radicalization of the social protests. Nor does it deny that conditions propitious to a reformist outcome existed. Precisely, it attributes the failure of reformism and the subsequent rise of the Derg to a series of mistakes and lack of determination on the part of the reformist camp in which educated aristocrats were also included.

The first and major mistake was none other than the decision to dismiss the old cabinet and nominate another according to the same methods. The best way to avoid the intervention of the military and the promotion of the radical discourse of students and intellectuals was to work toward the formation of a representative government through popular elections. Instead of the mere nomination of a new cabinet, which could not but comprise the same old elite operating without a popular mandate, a caretaker government essentially committed to organizing free elections should have been quickly put in place. Quite rightly, Teferra Haile-Selassie says,

The resignation of the cabinet was a miscalculated political error. . . . Since the resignation of the cabinet was not a pressing issue at that particular time, taking necessary legal steps, allowing the formation of political parties, committing the cabinet to a timetable for holding an election and formal transfer of power to the winning party, could have served as plausible options.⁶⁶

While taking circumstantial measures to alleviate the economic plights caused by the sudden rise of oil prices, especially as concerns the soldiers and the lower classes, the caretaker government should have demonstrated its commitment to reforms through the introduction of concrete and significant liberalizing steps. The assurance that real changes executed by elected representatives was on its way would have kept the army in the barracks, just as it would have isolated the radical discourse of students and intellectuals as an extremist position.

The change of cabinet did no more than worsen the situation. Instead of taking concrete measures guaranteeing the initiation of an irreversible process of change, the new cabinet aimed at appeasing the protests by means of palliative measures accompanied with vague and unreliable promises of change. En-dalkachew, the new prime minister,

took no immediate decisions that could have restored order, except for a second salary increase for the military and a cut in petrol prices. A policy statement published in March contained very little except for a generic commitment to economic development, the mention of a mild land reform which would have limited landholdings to what an individual could "develop," and a promise of legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relations.⁶⁷

Rather than responding to a challenging situation with appropriate measures, Endalkachew preferred a policy of appeasement, and so refrained from implementing real liberalizing reforms. Though a good opportunity for serious reforms existed—the emperor was weakened, the country was demanding changes, while the military were watchful—the new cabinet failed to exploit it. Yet, what would have given more assurance that the past is gone to never return than the implementation of concrete liberalizing reforms? It is this lack of reformist determination that explains both the genesis of the Derg and the increasing audience for radical discourses.

Consider the case of the “constitutional committee” that the new prime minister established. Set up to revise the 1955 Constitution, the committee was composed of conservatives and liberal members, including university professors. While the conservatives advocated minimal changes with the view of safeguarding the power of the emperor and the interests of the church and the nobility, the liberals argued for a full-fledged liberal constitution. Published in August 1974, the draft Constitution

called for the replacement of an absolute monarchy by a parliamentary regime, with the Emperor as a figurehead. It called for the divorce of Church and State, for a separation of powers, for civil rights and liberties, for universal suffrage, and made the Prime Minister responsible to Parliament.⁶⁸

The attempt to revise the Constitution in a non-liberalized context gave the impression that the new cabinet was determined to stay in power by means of palliative measures. Also, though liberal views prevailed within the committee and the ideas of constitutional monarchy and elected government had many followers in the armed forces as well as among the educated civilian population, the prime minister did not endorse the proposed constitution. Convinced that his primary task is to restore law and order, he viewed the proposal as an incitement to further turmoil.

Herein lies Endalkachew's second major miscalculation: he believed in the success of his policy of appeasement because he thought that he could persuade the military to help him restore law and order. In order to regain the control of the armed forces, he allowed substantial increases in pay and allowances to soldiers and officers. As a result, soldiers expressed their loyalty to the new cabinet and effectively demonstrated their support “when units of the 4th Division participated in dispersing a mass demonstration in the capital on 1 March.”⁶⁹ In addition to satisfying their demands, Endalkachew expected to gain the support of the military by demonstrating his commitment to reforms. To this effect, he encouraged the formation of a military commission led by his close associate and kin, Lieutenant-Colonel Alem Zewde Tessema, commander of the elite Airborne Brigade stationed near the capital.

The first task of the military commission was to restore order; consequently,

the commission was given sweeping powers to detain those who disturbed public peace and order, to hear petition of employees and/or organizations and dispose them in a manner it deemed fit. The power of the commission duplicated the attributions of existing ministries. The commission was a state within a state.⁷⁰

The second task of the commission was to clear the way for reforms by removing obstacles, including those coming from conservatives and opponents of the prime minister.⁷¹ The purge resulted in the arrest of members of the previous cabinet and some senior military officers as well as other civilian officials. In thus asking the military to help him implement reforms and remove refractory influential aristocrats and old ministers, Endalkachew, himself an aristocrat, hoped to demonstrate the seriousness of his reformist intention.

These measures suggest that the characterization of Endalkachew and his cabinet as a conservative government opposed to reforms should be taken with a pinch of salt. True, without the pressure of the military he would probably have not agreed to some of the measures he took. True also that he did not advocate structural changes because he thought that his most urgent task was to restore order. In his eyes, appeasing the immediate demands of soldiers and workers and bringing the military on his side would buy him time. Once order was restored, the government, he believed, could engage in the peaceful and gradual task of reforming the regime. And indeed, the new cabinet expressed a policy moving toward "a reformed constitutional monarchy, where the chief executive of the government, the Prime Minister, would be accountable to a parliament."⁷²

The policy of buying time instead of engaging quickly in the task of dismantling the old structures—as the liberals of the constitutional commission advocated—was indeed a miscalculation. The primacy given to temporary appeasement created the impression of a cabinet little committed to serious reforms. Where bold measures were needed, the cabinet's demand for patience sounded discordant and out of touch with reality. Instead of proposing concrete measures to dismantle the repressive apparatus and the various blockage of the old system, government controlled

press editorials fulminated against anarchy, chaos, disunity and disruption, and pleaded for patience and understanding for the government's efforts to deal with the accumulated problems of centuries. "Give them a chance, please," begged the *Ethiopian Herald* editorial of 6 April 1974.⁷³

Promises of reform in lieu of actual actions did no more than heighten the suspicion that the government was dragging its feet. While a positive and firm move toward reforms would have cut the ground from under the feet of radicals, the call for patience, however sincere it may have been, had the effect of justifying those advocating the removal of the new cabinet.

Above all, the creation of the military commission was a momentous blunder. What else could the creation of a military commission suggest but the inability of the civilian government to institute law and order? Was the setting up of

such military commission anything other than an invitation to the military to seize power? In effect, the tactic of creating a commission to regain the control of the armed forces backfired: it "prematurely provoked the armed forces to play a more active role in harnessing the political upheaval to their favor," just as it inspired opponents within the military to create a competing commission so as to counter the one supporting the prime minister.⁷⁴ Once the prime minister himself had sanctioned the breakup of the military chain of command by empowering an *ad hoc* commission, the path was open for the formation of other informal groups. Put otherwise, the new prime minister himself prepared the ground for the birth of the Derg.

The blame for inviting a military coup should not be put exclusively on the prime minister. In undermining through radicalized demands the formation of a large reformist movement, the civilian left, too, was inviting a military takeover. What other outcome could result from its call for a socialist revolution, in line with its prior commitment to the Leninist version of socialism, even as it had no organizational structure and unity to lead such a revolution? The invitation was all the more direct, since it criticized and rejected any attempt to institute liberal democracy. Against liberal democracy, *Challenge* writes, "the democracy of the people is new and antithetical to bourgeois electoral democracy. Aside from the fact that bourgeois democracy is banal, cheap, and superficial, it is also a direct antithesis of democracy by the people."⁷⁵ In thus abandoning legitimacy gained through liberal electoral victory for the much more premature goal of a people's democracy, whose requirement is the establishment of "a rigorous dictatorship," the civilian left was both sanctioning the seizure of power through unconstitutional means and justifying a dictatorial type of government.⁷⁶ The military could not but see this denigration of bourgeois democracy as a blessing for their political ambition.

To sum up, rather than the lack of favorable conditions, reformism failed because of the combined miscalculations of reformers and leftist groups. While the educated and reform-minded section of the ruling elite relied on a policy of gradual reform for fear of chaos and the unleashing of forces inimical to its own existence, the civilian left called for an immediate and radical revolution with the hope of assuming its leadership. Both the policy of gradual change and the call for radical revolution had the effect of drawing the armed forces into the center of the political battle. The unleashing of revolutionary process in a social context devoid of organized leadership created a vacuum that could not but invite the intervention of the military. Similarly, inasmuch as the policy of gradual change required the involvement of the armed forces in the task of ensuring law and order, it contained the great risk of reformers becoming hostage of the military. The next chapter will show how the miscalculations of political actors created conditions favoring the rise and radicalization of the Derg.

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68. Ottaway, "Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution," 478.
69. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 90.
70. Teferra, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991*, 102.
71. See Zenebe Feleke, *Neber* (Addis Ababa, 1996), 9-10.
72. Teferra, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991*, 118.
73. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 99.
74. Teferra, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991*, 121.
75. "Our Principles and Tasks in the Ethiopian Revolution," *Challenge* 12, no. 1 (March 1972): 6.
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The Ethiopian Military and the Formation of the Derg

The last chapter established that the fall of the imperial regime in a context devoid of a massive uprising of peasants and organized urban protests underscores the crucial role of the military. Given the rural quiescence and the organizational infancy of the urban unrest, it is undeniable that precipitating factors, however momentous they may have been, would not have led to the overthrow of the regime were it not for the critical involvement of a military committee, to wit, the Derg. Composed of students, workers, and petty bourgeois groups, the rebellious forces were neither strong enough nor sufficiently organized to topple the regime. Nor was the struggle within the ruling class between aristocrats and top bureaucrats refractory to a compromise. The intervention of the military committee, and that alone, had the organizational and material capacity to remove the monarch.

Controversy over the Role of the Derg

Notwithstanding the fact that the regime fell so rapidly and easily because it was abandoned by the very forces that were supposed to defend it, controversy rages among students of the Ethiopian Revolution over the exact role of the military. As alluded in the previous chapter, some assign the main role to students and intellectuals, when they do not consider the Derg as a counterrevolutionary intervention. Others insist that the Derg is the main reason why the social movement was radicalized and turned into a social revolution. Speaking of the controversy, Legesse Lemma notes that the role of students has been either exaggerated or downplayed. For some scholars,

"The Ethiopian students who [were] considered among the most radical in Africa, constituted the principal opposition force in the feudal land, and the loudest and most vigorous pressure for change." . . . On the other hand, Marina and David Ottaway later concluded that the students "were a rather confused and frustrated group" and that the part played by them "in touching off the revolution has been exaggerated."¹

A third position adopts a middle course by attributing equal importance to the students and the military in the radicalization of the social protest. Since my own position maintains that the rise of the Derg is the main factor that directed the social protest toward a revolutionary course, I must revisit the issue in order to strengthen my arguments.

The thesis defending the primary importance of students and intellectuals goes beyond the typical and well-known agitational and avant-garde role of students in social uprisings. In the case of Ethiopia, so the thesis maintains, their role was even greater: they have also spearheaded the revolution and furnished a significant portion of the urban opposition, thereby filling not only the role of missing political parties, but also providing the force that removed the imperial regime. Thus, for Gebru Mersha, in Ethiopia "what is most telling is that it was none other than [Ethiopian] intellectuals who caused the destruction of the feudal social edifice."²

As already indicated, the thesis presents two major defects: (1) students and intellectuals did not have the organizational ability necessary to overthrow a political regime; (2) their impact on urban protests is highly exaggerated, as few people outside the narrow circle of students and intellectuals were familiar with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Even if students and intellectuals had the organizational capacity allowing them to extend their influence, still they could not seriously threaten the regime without defections from among the military. This is what many scholars miss when they wonder how Haile Selassie's regime, which looked stable and firmly established, was so easily overthrown by an exclusively urban movement. Yet the answer to the question is rather simple: the regime fell, not because of civilian unrests and student demonstrations, but because the armed forces did not come to its rescue.

Because Ethiopian students and intellectuals overlooked this crucial military ingredient of a revolutionary situation, they ended up with a grossly exaggerated perception of themselves and of what they could do. They thus failed to listen to V. I. Lenin, who happens to be right on this particular issue when he maintains that "no revolution of the masses can triumph without the help of a portion of the armed forces that sustained the old regime."³ By assuming that the regime fell because of their opposition and demonstrations, Ethiopian students and intellectuals became enthralled with the idea of putting by themselves the country in the path of a people's democracy. A wised-up former militant of the MEISON, Andargachew Asseged, has this to say:

The vanguards of the Ethiopian petty bourgeoisie, including MEISON, even though they struggled bitterly for the establishment of a provisional people's government, had neither the organized material force nor the experience of struggle necessary to become competitors for power.⁴

From this correct assessment, Andargachew draws the basic mistake of the civilian left, namely, self-overestimation. If leftist groups had reached a realistic appraisal of their power and understood their inability to seize power, they would have changed the direction of the struggle. In other words, instead of power and people's democracy, the basic demand of the February uprising "should have been land and democracy."⁵

Where neither political parties nor accredited political leaders existed, the call for immediate election so as to capture state power was infantile and hazardous. As indicated in the last chapter, the only reasonable and productive way out was to allow the Endalkachew cabinet or some other group to liberalize the political system with a firm commitment to a time-table for holding free and national elections. Instead of wrestling democratic reforms from the weakened government, the civilian left wanted immediate elections with the view of establishing a people's democracy. To achieve this political goal, the left undertook a systematic sabotage of the Endalkachew cabinet. In addition to stigmatizing his aristocratic origin,

the students greeted his appointment with a hostile demonstration on 1 March. The University Teachers' Association came out with an uncompromising critique three days later. Then followed [a] general strike . . . , which was as much a political as an industrial act.⁶

It springs to mind that the rejection of the existing government in the absence of credible political alternatives did no more than incite the military to intervene. The incitement was all the greater since it easily took the form of the call of duty in the face of impending anarchy resulting from unrealistic demands. Rene Lefort asks the right question when he says, "at a time when the Throne was hesitating and Parliament was paralyzed, was it plausible to expect the only coherently organized body still surviving in the confusion to stay on the sidelines awaiting civilian revolution?"⁷ The answer is obviously no, though at the time it did not appear to be so to leftist activists. Accordingly, "when the Derg officially took over control of the country, it was then not seen as usurping power, but as saving the country from chaos."⁸

The correct assessment of the role of students and intellectuals maintains that the protests and, most of all, the agitational works of leftist forces were important to the extent that they created conditions enabling the military to first intervene and then overthrow the imperial government. Stated otherwise, their role was crucial in undermining both ideologically and politically the imperial regime as well any other alternative to the socialist course. To quote Haggai Erlich:

It would be the strikes and demonstrations by various wings of the urban civil sector which, so it seems, frustrated the efforts of the ruling establishment to maintain its position through the adoption of a moderate and seemingly progressive policy, and would indirectly help the nucleus of radical and politically ambitious young officers to get organized, unite the leaders of the various NCO-led committees and, after gaining supremacy by the end of June, start the revolutionary process.⁹

While I endorse Erlich's view on the impact of the civilian unrests and the leading revolutionary role of the Derg, I am reluctant to follow his assumption that leftist elements gained supremacy in the Derg. Though leftist young officers had no doubt played an important role in the military unrest, their representation was minimal within the Derg. The latter was mostly composed of little politicized elements for the simple reason that it was set up through various units sending elected representatives. A major paradox is that a committee that initially had few radicalized members launched the Ethiopian Revolution. The assumption that the Derg was an outcome of the victory of leftist officers falsely simplifies the enigmatic question of its radicalization, which occurred after the seizure of political power.

The question of radicalization is all the more perplexing the more one recalls that the Derg initially came up with a nationalist ideology whose main slogan was *Ethiopia Tikdem* ("Ethiopia First"). So radical a turn from a nationalist platform to the ideology of scientific socialism in a matter of months was bound to raise controversy among scholars of the Ethiopian Revolution. What makes the Derg's radicalization both a surprise and a paradox is that its members did not belong to "a secret political party, or [to] some leftwing military conspiratorial group."¹⁰ We shall review the various interpretations with the view of showing that, of all the explanations suggested by scholars, the most consistent and reflective of the facts as we know them is the thesis that conflicts between competing groups within the Derg account for its radicalization. But before tackling the issue of radicalization, let us set the military background for the rise of the Derg and its inherent conflicts by a brief account of the conditions of the armed forces prior to the 1974 unrests.

Ethiopian Armed Forces under Haile Selassie

When the first mutinies and social unrests broke out in 1974, Ethiopia had the largest army of all sub-Saharan African countries. The size of the armed forces had reached approximately 40,000 men, which was a huge number by African standards. Additionally, the armed forces had achieved the reputation of being the most efficient and best trained and equipped in sub-Saharan Africa. The need to maintain this large army essentially emanated from the perception of a hostile environment involving neighboring Arab governments and the Somali state with its vast territorial claims inside Ethiopia. In addition to perceived external

threats, the size of the armed forces had to be increased in connection with internal armed insurgencies, notably in Eritrea and Bale.

Naturally, the maintenance of this huge military force was a serious drain on the country's resources. Available statistics show that

throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, money for defense remained the largest single item in the budget, varying from 19 to 24 percent of the total funds appropriated for all national programs. . . . In 1974 Addis Ababa allocated the equivalent of US \$80 million for defense.¹¹

Without direct and substantial aid from the U.S. government, Haile Selassie could not have afforded a costly military force for such a long time. According to Donald Levine, "the amount given to Ethiopia from 1950 to 1965 exceeds U.S. \$91 million, approximately half of the amount of military aid given in all Africa during this period."¹²

Besides being sizeable, fairly well-trained, and well-equipped, the Ethiopian armed forces under Haile Selassie presented the character of being ethnically integrated. Indeed, one aspect that separated the military institution from the evolution of the society was that "ethnically, the armed forces were considerably more integrated than the civil wing of the state apparatus."¹³ Thus, the Oromo, who constituted the largest contingent among the rank and file, proved to be as much (if not more) attached to Ethiopia's national unity as Amhara or Tigrean soldiers. This explains the Derg's unwavering commitment to national unity: even when it was encountering a series of devastating military setbacks in Eritrea and Tigray, by and large the bulk of its military force remained faithful to Ethiopian unity. The explanation for this nationalist stand is not hard to find: more than in any other institution, assimilation and integration conditioned military career. Especially, "entry into the officer corps [postulated] thorough assimilation into the dominant culture and society."¹⁴ Moreover, military style of life facilitated the assimilation process: since people belonging to the same rank shared the same conditions of life, integration was easily achieved.

The more we emphasize that Ethiopia had a large and fairly well-trained military force, the more we bring out its professionalism, and the less comprehensible the emergence of the Derg becomes. The latter signified nothing less than the breakup of the military hierarchy, which should have been hard to achieve in a military force defined by its professionalism. Understandably, in other African countries, sergeants and corporals could initiate military coups or become generals, given the colonial roots of their military institutions. Different was the Ethiopian military force: its indigenous roots, professionalism, and the environment of an established hierarchical society make the rise of the Derg through the sidelining of senior officers an aberrant outcome. In so saying, I am not so much ruling out the possibility of a military coup as simply stating that it should have come from officers at the top of the military hierarchy. Two things must, therefore, be explained: first, how is it that a military coup led by senior officers never materialized, all the more so as it had been attempted once; se-

cond, how were lower-ranked officers and NCOs able to accomplish what senior officers failed to realize?

The absence of a military coup prior to 1974 remains a baffling question when we see the extent to which existing conditions seemed very conducive. This much was true: the politicization of the military kept growing as the regime relied more and more on repressive methods of government. As Harold Marcus remarks, "by 1973, it was clear that the power behind the throne was the army. Most Ethiopia watchers believed the military would take over once the emperor died."¹⁵ It is uncharacteristic of the military to wait when conditions tell them so loudly that they represent the real power behind the throne. So why didn't the most likely occurrence become true, even as "rumors of new coup attempts abounded in the early sixties?"¹⁶ In other words, given the 1960 attempted military coup, how was the emperor able to retain the control of the military amidst increasing social and even military unrests for more than fourteen years?

All the more reason for ruminating over such a question is that in the 1960s and 1970s military coups were endemic in Third World countries to the point of becoming a fashion. To assume that the vogue had no inspirational effect on Ethiopian generals, especially after the military saved the regime by crushing the rebellious Imperial Guard in 1960, is little convincing. The fact that the regime owed its existence to the military must have increased politicization both among officers and the rank and file. An immediate expression of increased politicization was the new-found audacity of the military. As already indicated, at various times throughout the 1960s and early 1970s soldiers made successful demands for pay increases and additional allowances.

Politicization was bound to increase as more and more educated young Ethiopians sought careers in the armed forces. Especially, high school and college dropouts, who were already politicized, had no other choice than to go into a military career, given the scarcity of employment opportunities in the civilian sectors. Thus,

between 1960 and 1974, the two officer training schools for the army (in Holetta and Harer) had graduated over 1600 officers, about two-thirds of the army's officers. Most of the new officers were better trained than their predecessors, and many service academy graduates also attended colleges and associated with civilian intellectuals who were the prime opponents of the imperial regime.¹⁷

Mention should be made here that the graduates of Harar Military Academy were particularly unhappy with the regime because most of them were not volunteers: "the government drafted college freshmen and among the best of secondary school graduates into the military academy."¹⁸ The number of young educated recruits kept on growing, as the modernization of the armed forces and the use of advanced equipments required more skilled personnel. As a result, "new units such as the airborne regiment and technically-oriented units such as

the engineers, signals, artillery and armor, units that played important roles in the military uprising in 1974, attracted a large number of the young recruits."¹⁹

With the growing recruitment of modern educated Ethiopians, political consciousness among the military was rising, all the more so as the army was increasingly used to repress social movements of protest. These included student protests, peasants uprising in Gojjam, and regional revolts in Eritrea, Ogaden, and Bale. In particular, both low-ranked officers and the rank and file were dissatisfied with the inefficient method used to fight the continuous guerrilla warfare in Eritrea. At any rate, the imperial regime's repressive method against social protests together with the extremely slow pace of modernization could not but increase political awareness in the armed forces, notably among the educated recruits. Moreover, the multiplication of regional revolts had made life hazardous and inconvenient for many units stationed in Eritrea and Bale. The economic downturns caused by the increased price of oil intensified the deterioration of the conditions of life, making the life of units stationed in remote and rebellious areas even more detestable. To measure the impact of these increased hardships, just recall that "the military mutiny that precipitated the social turmoil in 1974 started as demands for higher pay and better working conditions . . . especially for those serving in remote outposts such as the Ogaden, Negele, and the desert of western Eritrea."²⁰

Political Impotence

For Patrick Gilkes and others, the major reason for the surprising lack of a military coup before the 1974 "was the deep divisions within the Armed Forces, especially in the officer corps."²¹ Indeed, the officer corps was fractured along various lines. The major division combined generational and educational disparities. While the top echelon of the armed forces was filled with traditionally-minded people, who were mostly veterans of the Italo-Ethiopian war, the lower echelon of the officer corps was composed of young and modern-educated Ethiopians. Besides disparity in terms of age, the generational difference had a contentious component stemming from unequal educational and professional trainings as well as from different political outlooks. The senior officers did not go to modern schools; nor did they have extensive professional training. In terms of political standing, some were influenced by their own aristocratic roots and their close links with land-holding families; other supported the regime because they owed their position to the emperor. By contrast, the young officers were either high school or college graduates and had extensive training in local or overseas military academies. Politically, most had few ties with the landed class and shared the view of their generation, which was one of increasing loss of confidence in the modernizing will of Haile Selassie. These antagonisms "based on educational and professional background and political outlook" kept senior and junior officers apart and made them mutually suspicious.²²

It must not be made to seem that the upper level of the armed forces was free of internal animosities. On the contrary, two major competing groups had

emerged. On the one hand, there was the group to which most senior officers belonged and whose characteristic was that they "came from modest political and social backgrounds and owed their position and influence entirely to the emperor."²³ Opposed to this group was a smaller but influential faction composed of highly placed senior officers with aristocratic background. Those who played a major role in defeating the 1960 coup, such as General Abiye Abebe and General Merid Mengesha, came from this group. The aristocratic group and the group of commoners held each other in mutual antipathy and suspicion, especially after the failure of the coup.

Just as the upper level, the lower level of the officer corps suffered from internal divisions and frictions. The most important one was the rivalry between the officers who graduated from Holeta and those who graduated from Harar Military Academy. Training in the Holeta Military Training Center lasted from six months to about a year and was offered to cadets who were noncommissioned officers or to volunteers who did not finish secondary schools. The Harar Military Academy had a much higher academic and military standard: the training lasted three years and was given to college students or high school graduates. Despite the obviously unequal academic and military training, the system granted the rank of second lieutenant at graduation to cadets of both institutions. The disparity in training and academic background could not but breed hostile relationships arising from the fact that Harar graduates, who tended to see themselves as an exclusive military elite, looked down upon Holeta graduates.

A similar disparity had developed between the various units of the armed forces. As the bulk of the military force, Ethiopian ground forces were composed of diverse people with unequal academic and military trainings. Different was the situation in such units as the air force and the navy, which "were organized in the postwar period [and] were small, but the technical nature of their operations meant recruitment of officers with higher levels of education."²⁴ In addition to developing greater internal cohesion, the smaller units were politically more radicalized as well as elitist. Clearly, these hostile relations between groups and units fractured the lower level of the officer corps. We shall see the far-reaching consequences of these ruptures on the destiny of the Derg itself.

The emphasis on internal divisions and educational disparities may go against the previous affirmation describing the Ethiopian armed forces as a fairly well-trained and professional force. I do not deny that these divisions reduce professionalism without, however, erasing it completely. There is no denying that the armed forces were indeed well-trained and professional at the level of junior officers up to the rank of major. Such was not the case at the top echelon of the armed forces: with some exceptions, most generals had no formal military training and were rather corrupt and incompetent in leadership ability. The scope of incompetence and corruption was greater among the many officers who became generals either because of their aristocratic links or because of their absolute loyalty to the emperor.

The disparity between the top leadership and the middle and lower levels of the officer corps suggests that the military establishment and the civilian society were suffering from the same disease, namely, the prevalence of incompetent and corrupt leadership. Because unfit people dominated the top echelons, the younger, better-trained, and more educated officers could not have a say in the organization and direction of the armed forces. The preponderance of traditionalists over modernizing elements could not but frustrate junior officers and develop a deep animosity between them and senior officers. Unsurprisingly, one of the rules that created the Derg stipulated the exclusion of officers above the rank of major.

To the question of why a military coup did not occur, one obvious answer is thus the hampering effect of these internal divisions and conflicts. Both the divisions between senior and junior officers and the lack of horizontal solidarity at the lower and upper levels of the officer corps generated a situation of mutual suspicion that made the armed forces incapable of concerted action. Without the development of internal cohesion, the planning of a military coup is not only hazardous, but also bound to fail. The 1960 attempted coup is proof that internal cohesion is a prerequisite to insurrectional ability. Unlike the national army, the Imperial Guard, especially the officers, had developed internal cohesion. A number of reasons explain the greater cohesion of the Imperial Guard. First of all, it was smaller and better equipped than the national army and enjoyed stability of command. Both its mission and the resulting preferential treatment that it received from the emperor created a sense of distinct identity and specialness. The participation of the Imperial Guard in the Korean War had already facilitated the development of internal cohesion. In addition to registering military feats that enhanced its prestige, the participation strengthened the *esprit de corps* of the officers. If a coup was to happen, no other military unit than the Imperial Guard could plan and execute it for the simple reason that it alone was capable of concerted action.

Important as these educational and generational disparities were, they could not completely incapacitate the armed forces without the involvement of additional factors. In this regard, the command structure of the armed forces itself had the additional input of intensifying divisions. Indeed, as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, not only did Haile Selassie take all the important decisions, but also he retained "the power to appoint, promote, transfer and dismiss military officers."²⁵ As a result, the minister of defense, the minister of interior—under whom were the chief of police and the chief of security—and the commander of the Imperial Guard reported directly to the emperor. Moreover, so personalized a command meant that many "senior officers had direct access to the emperor, who cultivated rivalries between military leaders and monitored their activities through a multiple surveillance network."²⁶ When you add to the mutual suspicion the presence of an emperor with a ubiquitous system of control and surveillance, the possibility of a military coup becomes quite remote.

The power to appoint and dismiss commanders gave the emperor a decisive weapon to ward off military coups, since it allowed him to periodically shift his

generals from one army post to another, or even to appoint them to civilian posts and call back those who had already taken civilian responsibilities. The purpose of these rotating appointments was none other than to prevent senior officers from constituting a power base. As Ross K. Baker explains,

The Emperor's system of personnel shuffling is not conducive to lasting friendships based upon sustained assignment to a unit. . . . Any civilian or military official of any importance risks arbitrary transfer if the Emperor perceives that he has built up an independent power-base or is more than nominally popular.²⁷

A pertinent example is the emperor's decision to appoint the most able and popular general, Aman Mikael Andom—hero of the 1964 war against Somalia and future chairman of the Derg—to a senatorial post. Clearly, the emperor's fear of his popularity outweighed the great service he could give to the defense of the country. Such a system of arbitrary rotation of commanders inevitably weakened the fighting ability of the armed forces, since its outcome was that mediocre, corrupt, and servile generals replaced efficient and popular commanders. The proliferation of mediocre and unpopular commanders is one of the reasons for the collapse of the military hierarchy and the emergence of the Derg.

The absence of a central command meant that the various branches of the armed forces were connected only through the person of the emperor. The latter used the system not only to appoint and dismiss at will, but also to do it in such a way that appointees neutralize each other by their rivalries. As one scholar remarks, "rivalry, distrust and competition between office-holders could thus be used by the ruler to secure loyalty and keep the powerful members of the system in dependency."²⁸ As a rule, the emperor used to nominate a general of aristocratic extraction and one from the parvenu faction to the posts of commander and deputy commander or vice versa. Given their mutual suspicion and hostility, how else could the two generals relate to each other but as spies?

Bribery was another method that the emperor used to stifle rebellious ideas among senior officers. According to Levine,

The income of the higher-ranking officers has been impressive by Ethiopian standards. They have received substantial salaries, free housing, free cars, and servants and retainers drawn from the ranks. In many cases their income is supplemented by rents from land holdings in the provinces and urban real estate, and at times by personal gifts presented directly by the Emperor.²⁹

Unmistakably, the purpose of these bribes and special treatments was to draw higher-ranking officers into the system of privileges so that they developed a strong interest in its preservation. Studies show that "military bureaucrats have the potential for leading a revolution from above when the officer class—or a significant segment of it—is independent of those classes which control the means of production."³⁰ In the case of Ethiopia, the autonomy of the high-ranking officers from the interests of the landed class was shattered by a system-

atic policy of land grants, higher salaries, and other privileges. Consequently, the upper level of the officer corps was totally integrated into the landed class, and as such little prone to rebel against the landholding system.

The special treatment of higher officers was also a way of poisoning their relationships with lower levels of the officer corps. Only a relationship of mistrust and spite could result from the contrast between the lavish treatment of senior officers and the distressingly low incomes of junior officers and enlisted men. In a military force so angered against the top leadership, the probability of senior officers mounting a coup was thus close to zero.

What all this means is that, while the divide and rule scheme allowed Haile Selassie to take complete control of his entourage, it also created a pattern that made his supporters unable to act outside his express command. So that, when the emperor became incapacitated and unable to deal with the popular discontent, senior officers were totally paralyzed and thus incapable of taking the initiatives necessary to save the regime as well as their own position.

Want of Vision

Another reason that blocked the occurrence of a military coup was the absence of a nationalist ideology harboring anti-Western or anti-left mottos. Modern history shows that autonomous military bureaucrats often attempt *coups d'état* in support of movements demanding an end to national dilapidation and cultural decline perpetrated by the dominance of foreign powers. Turkey, Egypt, Libya, and Peru provide examples of politicization of the armed forces around a nationalist ideology in response to "the rise of mass movements within the country demanding an end to national degradation."³¹ As shown by the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, what specifically defines such movements is the xenophobic rejection of Western values and the call for the defense and revitalization of traditional cultures.

In the case of Ethiopia, none of the classes with which the higher echelon of the military could identify initiated a movement denouncing the West and the resulting decline of Ethiopia. No section of the nobility developed a xenophobic tendency. Surprising as it may sound, neither did the Ethiopian church: turned into an appendage of the crown by Haile Selassie's reform, it remained attached to the emperor and did not develop any dissident thinking that denounced the corrupting influence of Western values and the loss of national sovereignty. The only section of the population that deplored national degradation was the student movement with which the military elite could never identify because of its Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The absence of a nationalist ideology denouncing the West and demanding the renovation of the traditional culture deprived high-ranking officers of the social supporter necessary to contemplate the capture of political power. Most of all, without a diffused movement of nationalist indignation, senior officers could not count on the spontaneous adherence of soldiers to their subversive plan. Unable to take up a national mission or a specific task of renovation, their scheme

would have been interpreted as nothing more than a conspiracy inspired by greed and personal ambition. What explains the lack of a restorative movement is the scarcity among the modern educated elite, the clergy, and the civilian bureaucrats of people with conservative beliefs. Most intellectuals were either Marxist or liberal while many bureaucrats did not have any firm ideological commitment. As to the church, we saw that it did not embrace any serious movement of renewal and opposition to the imperial regime. Had a diffused revitalizing movement existed, it would have allowed some high army officers to assume a sense of mission and contemplate a takeover of political power.

The perception of Western powers as allies rather than enemies hampered the development of a movement of renewal. The perception goes back to Ethiopia regaining its independence thanks to the British military intervention. The fact that Ethiopia was not colonized and, most of all, that Western powers helped Haile Selassie defeat the colonial ambition of Italy greatly contributed to the lack of grudge among Ethiopian upper classes against the West. Add to this perception of friendship what was said in a previous chapter, namely, the sense of sharing with the West some common cultural attributes through the heritage of Christianity, which was all the more underlined in light of the prevailing sensitivity to the idea of Ethiopia being surrounded by hostile Muslim countries. With the exception of radicalized students and intellectuals, both the preservation of Ethiopian independence and the sense of a common cultural heritage precluded the rise among the ruling elite and the bureaucratic class of a nationalist ideology blaming the West for Ethiopia's predicaments. Far from being perceived as imperialist dependency, economic and military connections with the West were viewed as integration into the circle of friendly countries.

A conservative nationalist ideology would have developed in Ethiopia if a leftist insurgency strong enough to threaten the regime existed, as it did in some countries in Latin America and elsewhere. Unlike the situation in countries where leftist parties were vying for power, Ethiopian leftist groups had confined their political activities to schools and university campuses; at any rate, they were nowhere near to appearing as a serious threat to the existing ruling class. The lack of leftist danger prevented the intervention of high-ranking army officers into the political arena in the name of protecting the social order against communist subversion. Though some were dissatisfied with the way Haile Selassie was running the country, their dissatisfaction never reached the level of an ideological difference. They did not have a different vision; they simply found the emperor's methods improper. As to the rebellion of the Imperial Guard, it is not an objection to the lack of ideological difference. The rebellion was an isolated event that occurred because the commander came under the ideological influence of his brother, Girmame Newaye, who had leftist inclinations in addition to being Western-educated.

In conclusion, the reasons why xenophobic or anti-Western movements developed in many Third World countries did not exist in Ethiopia. As a result, the nationalist and conservative ideology that senior officers needed to justify a mil-

itary coup was not available. Moreover, when military unrest and civilian demonstrations started, the generals were not in a position to react efficiently. A protracted relationship of mutual mistrust and hostility prevented them from responding in a concerted way. Still less were they able to take the necessary initiative to salvage the existing social order and their own interests, accustomed as they were to obeying the exclusive order of the emperor. With the emperor diminished, a prompt initiative was needed, but they could neither agree on the action nor rely on the support of junior officers and enlisted men. Hesitation and inaction gave time to junior officers to step in and take the initiative of establishing a representative committee so as to avoid conflict between various units, as happened in the 1960 coup. This initiative opened the road to social adventure, since as soon as "the politically-minded officers of intermediate rank started riding on the back of [the] horse of protest movement, it was the beginning of a revolution."³²

The Formation of the Derg

Even if the nature of the armed forces was scarcely conducive to the planning of a military coup, there is no denying that the inability of the existing government to quell the social unrests invited the military to intervene in some way. What is surprising, then, is not the military intervention but the form it took, that is, the emergence of the Derg. Let us briefly review the circumstances leading to the genesis of the Derg.

On March 1, 1974, radical military officers circulated leaflets clearly stating for the first time political instead of corporate demands. Thus, they demanded that "the government implement land reforms, create political parties and hold free elections, release political prisoners, allow a free press, and bring to trial former ministers for corruption and dereliction of duty."³³ Not only did these demands announce the beginning of the political intervention of the military, but also they were immediately followed by a major political decision, namely, the decision to form a representative committee overseeing the implementation of the demands. In light of the absence of political parties and the weakening of the regime, the officers who initiated the demands

decided to organize such an opposition, and in order to legitimize it, they sought a mandate from the armed forces, who were asked to send to Addis Ababa three representatives per unit: a junior officer, a noncommissioned officer, and an enlisted man. Thus was born the Coordinating Committee of the Armed forces, Police, and Territorial Army (Derg) which officially came into being on June 28, 1974.³⁴

With 120 members, the majority of the committee was thus composed of non-commissioned and enlisted soldiers. There were only forty-nine officers, out of which twenty-six held the highest rank of major. The Derg quickly manifested its political ambition: it demanded and obtained the appointment of a new prime minister and defense minister; it also started to arrest officials of the imperial

regime, who were either accused of corruption or opposing the implementation of reforms. These actions were clear stepping-stones toward the seizure of political power, which became effective when the emperor was deposed on September 12.

What provoked the formation of the Derg is, without doubt, the inability of the existing government to effectively deal with the crisis. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Endalkachew cabinet proved unable to restore law and order. Nor was it able to respond to the social demands by carrying out appropriate reforms. These failures contained the danger of serious disruption and anarchy that could only encourage the eruption of violent confrontations and secessionist activities. In the face of these dangers, junior officers decided to put aside their differences so as to constitute a representative committee whose task was to restore order and pressure for the implementation of reforms. The attempt to understand the inception of the Derg must also consider the impact left by the 1960 *coup d'état*. The idea of creating a committee representative of all units was clearly designed to avoid a repetition of the division and fighting within the armed forces that led to the failure of the coup.

Let us not forget that Endalkachew himself encouraged the creation of a military committee. As we saw in the last chapter, both to consolidate his power and wipe off his reputation as an irredeemable aristocrat, he ordered the military committee led by Lieutenant-Colonel Alem Zewde Tessema to arrest "200 former ministers, generals, and other prominent officials" on charges of corruption and embezzlement.³⁵ This offensive had the effect of strengthening Alem Zewde and the group of moderates in the committee to the great frustration of radical members, who mostly came from the Debre-Zeit air force base. This first open conflict among military elites created the need to form a rival committee. Together with other radical members, air force representatives "formed a different committee centered on the air base."³⁶ Soon after, helicopters dropped leaflets demanding political changes, including a government directly elected by the people. On March 25, following Endalkachew's order, Alem Zewde and his paratroops "encircled the airbase. . . . seized control over many key posts in Addis Ababa," and arrested "twenty-seven of their revolutionary colleagues known to have taken an active part in the February revolt."³⁷

This crackdown on rebellious officers did not contain the military unrests. On the contrary, leaflets condemning the crackdown were thrown from helicopters, while students stepped up their denunciation of Endalkachew and his cabinet. The intensification of civil and military unrests helped officers opposing Endalkachew, like Major Atnafu Abate, to take control of the Addis Ababa committee. This rival group passed to the offensive and telegraphed to all units to elect and send representatives to Addis Ababa. Colonel Alem Zewde fled the capital while troops were sent to take control of Radio Ethiopia and other important places. The formation of the Derg was, therefore, a consequence of the victory of officers who opposed the new prime minister over those who supported him.

More than the intervention of the military, which was predictable in the face of the government's failure to handle the ongoing social crisis, what needs to be emphasized is its unusual outcome, namely, the formation of the Derg. Those who initiated it brought about the collapse of the military hierarchy, thereby preventing a coup from above. Without the initiative of junior and noncommissioned officers to form a representative committee, the continuation of the social unrest would have, sooner or later, convinced senior officers to overcome their divisions and attempt a coup in the name of law and order.

What happened as a result of the emergence of the Derg is quite consequential. As a product of improvised and unorganized elections, the 120 members came from various sectors and per force had different beliefs and interests. We could find among them conservative, moderate, radical, and even apolitical members. To quote Gilkes,

The views of the whole Committee, not surprisingly, covered a wide spectrum of opinion from the near conservative to the strongly radical and in this sense represented the attitudes of their units—the most radical being the Air Force and, after the deposition of Haile Selassie on 12 September, the Bodyguard.³⁸

In this wide spectrum of opinions, no individual or group could claim the title of leader. Such a situation could not but set the stage for a full-scale and bitter struggle for power both among individuals and various rival groups. The next chapter will show how this power struggle, together with other inflammatory factors, brought about the tortuous but ever increasing radicalization of the Derg.

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Disputes over the Radicalization of the Derg

To devote a whole chapter to the radicalization of the Derg after the overthrow of the imperial regime may seem to reverse the normal sequence of events. Yet, this is indeed how things occurred: radicalization was posterior to Haile Selassie's overthrow. In this regard, two factors must be stated: (1) the Ethiopian Revolution would not have taken the path of socialist transformations without the radicalization of the Derg, which radicalization remains extremely problematic, given that most members of the Derg did not have a prior commitment to the Marxist-Leninist ideology; (2) the overthrow of the imperial regime did not by itself require a Marxist-Leninist ideology; on the contrary, what was predictable was a reformist change through either the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with an autonomous civilian government or a classic military regime committed to a nationalist ideology. None of these possible developments would have affected the class structure and the ideological texture of the country. The surprise is that Ethiopia was thrown into the turmoil of a social revolution through a series of socialist measures. Such a political orientation contained more than the original reasons for overthrowing the imperial regime. We need to explain this excess of change, and for this we review some authoritative explanations beginning with those authors who maintain that the Derg was the work of already radicalized officers.

The Thesis of the Prior Radicalization of the Derg

Raul Valdez Vivo, a Cuban author, gives the most consistent account of the thesis of the prior radicalization of the Derg in his book titled *Ethiopia's Revolution*. Written in 1978, this little book is hardly a serious and academic study of the Revolution; it is more of a pamphlet full of stereotypes about socialism and

the role of the masses and a propaganda piece designed to acclaim the military regime, especially Mengistu Haile Mariam, who became chairman of the Derg in February 1977. Nonetheless, Vivo's book is interesting because of the parallel it suggests between the Cuban and the Ethiopian Revolutions and, most of all, because it articulates the official thesis of the Derg itself. The main idea of the author is that socialist ideology in Ethiopia is a product of the spontaneous revolt and struggle of the working masses. Because revolt preceded ideology, a chapter of the book is titled "A Revolution Seeking its Ideology."¹

According to Vivo, in the absence of the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party, what explains the radicalization of the masses is not ideology, but the intensification of class struggle between exploiters and exploited subsequent to the feudal class's stubborn resistance to change. To the question, "how could there be a revolution without some organized revolutionary movement?" his answer is: "the objective conditions of poverty and oppression pushed the popular masses into action with growing determination, which increased at the same rate as the imperial government maneuvered and drew back."² It leaps to mind that Vivo's position significantly downplays the role of students and the intelligentsia. Though the latter have supported social demands since the early 1960s, they did not spearhead the Revolution, which was the spontaneous product of the masses rising against an oppressive system. Students and the civilian left joined the uprising rather as allies than as leaders. This is so true that when the stakes became high with the intensification of the Revolution, a growing number of students and intellectuals betrayed the working masses and joined the reactionary camp. Speaking of the opposition of the civilian left to the Derg, Vivo says,

Many students have themselves ended up on the side of the oppressors, whether or not they want to admit it. The so-called Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), that engages in counterrevolutionary terrorism in the cities, originally drew its ranks from the students.³

Even though the masses spontaneously started the revolution, they needed an organized leadership to shatter the resistance of the imperial regime and implement a new social order. According to Vivo, the Derg furnished the much-needed leadership and organization. One reason for this historic role was that, in the absence of political parties, only the army, the sole organized institution with some remaining ability to function, could assume the leadership of the Revolution. The situation, that is, "the mass of the people having no ideological or organizational vehicle that could implant a new social order, gave the army—the only institution still on its feet amidst the uprising, economic disaster, famine and confusion—a sort of mandate to rule," writes Vivo.⁴ Be it noted that his argument does no more than repeat the very justification by which the Derg and its supporters defended the seizure of political power.

It is obvious that the provision of revolutionary leadership by the military poses more questions than it can solve. Why did the military assume the leader-

ship of a social protest instead of crushing it, as they usually do? What radicalized them? Here intervenes the role of radical officers, especially of Mengistu Haile Mariam, for they are responsible for directing the armed forces toward a revolutionary course. Singling out Mengistu, Vivo writes:

One of them, the son of a slave, had experienced racial discrimination in the United States. . . . He had also known about the war in Vietnam. . . . Through his experience in the United States, Mengistu began to get a clear view of the present world with its irrepressible increase of revolutions, rebellions and conflicts.⁵

It follows that the true initiators and implementers of the socialist revolution are the radical officers, not students and intellectuals. First, they have successfully moved the bulk of the armed forces away from the traditional role of protecting the imperial regime. Second, they have created an appropriate revolutionary organ, namely, the Derg, which planned a socialist revolution and ensured its triumph. Without the work of these radical officers, the armed forces would have sided with the forces of reaction. The primary role in this achievement goes to Mengistu, for he "showed himself to be not just a captain, but a political leader the Revolution needed."⁶

Another author who goes along with Vivo is Blair Thomson, with the difference that he has no sympathy for the Revolution. For him, with the exception of a few radical groups both among the civilians and military, most people were aspiring to some kind of liberal revolution resulting in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. These radical groups were not satisfied with the various concessions made by the regime simply because of their prior Marxist commitment. In particular, radicals in the armed forces are directly responsible for the difficulties of Endalkachew cabinet, since

there had never been a plot to overthrow the government. What had happened was that the "ginger group" of radicals in the air force—of which the NCO claimed to be the leader—had, with the support of officers and pilots at Ethiopia's three main air force bases and of similar radicals in several army units; decided to do something to show their dissatisfaction with the speed of reforms.⁷

These radical groups existed prior to the outburst of the social and military protests, and they naturally saw the explosion as a long-awaited opportunity. The center of these radicalized groups was the air force, which Thomson terms as "an acknowledged hotbed of radicalism," one reason being the high percentage of Eritrean servicemen.⁸

Though the Derg was clearly the work of radicalized servicemen, many observers were misled because it did not immediately announce its radical commitment. On the contrary, the Derg repeatedly expressed its loyalty to the emperor and came up with a reformist agenda in its *Ethiopia Tikdem* program. For Thomson, these moderate positions were part of a systematic camouflage to buy

time, given that the country and the armed forces were not yet ready for the removal of the monarch, still less for a socialist program. To quote him:

Faced with this delicate situation, the radicals in the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee knew they had to proceed with caution, without alarming the public—or the ordinary policeman and soldier. . . . Hence their repeated expressions of loyalty, and their assurances that the military only wanted to clear the decks, as it were, to allow the civilian administration to function properly and get on with reforms.⁹

While expressing their loyalty, the radical leaders of the Derg were implementing a careful, step-by-step program of propaganda and action that patently put the country on the path of a socialist revolution. Among the top leaders, Thomson cites Mengistu who was already known for a "strongly left-wing and eastward-looking in his politics" and Major Atnafu Abate, the second vice-chairman of the Derg, who was "believed to be the force now pushing the revolution decidedly to the left."¹⁰

Thomson's interpretation agrees with the interview that Mengistu gave to an Ethiopian journalist from his hiding-place in Zimbabwe. According to him, the Derg had adopted socialism quite early, but was not in a position to announce it officially because it did not want to antagonize the American government for fear of not receiving the much-needed weapons to defend the country against secessionist forces and hostile neighbors. So members of the Derg watered down their commitment to socialism: they spoke of "Ethiopian socialism" in order to minimize the revolutionary content of their policy. In reality, Ethiopian socialism was but a disguised name for scientific socialism. Witness: the most important revolutionary measures, such as the nationalization of rural and urban lands, were taken under the banner of Ethiopian socialism.¹¹ When it became clear that the American response was negative, the disguise was no longer necessary. The Derg openly proclaimed scientific socialism its guiding ideology and immediately initiated discussions with leftist organizations aimed at forming a common front, thereby firmly directing the country toward a socialist development.

This means that the socialist orientation was the direct product of the predominance of radical officers within the Derg. There was no progressive process of radicalization: the statements of loyalty to the emperor, the hesitations in policy formulation, the lack of ideological clarity, etc., were simply tactical devices derived from the need to hide the true commitment of the Derg so as not to alarm the country, the soldiers, and foreign powers by premature radical declarations. For Thomson and others who think like him, the dominant belief that the Revolution had no leadership is, therefore, a mistaken one. Behind the spontaneous civilian and military protests, there was an invisible hand, an underground group of radicalized officers who planned and directed the process of the Revolution. "An Ethiopian friend once remarked to me that the difficulty of assessing

events in his country was that in Ethiopia even the tip of the iceberg was hidden," writes Thomson.¹²

Against the Thesis of Prior Radicalization

Before criticizing the theory, I must underline that I welcome Vivo's emphasis on the decisive role of Mengistu, even though I discard the substance of his thesis. As indicated in Chapter 4, the explanation of the radicalization of the Ethiopian Revolution in exclusively structural terms leaves so many questions unanswered that it urges for a supplement of subjective factors, among others the personality of Mengistu and the circumstances of his rise to the leadership of the Derg. Vivo came to emphasize the role of Mengistu because of the insufficiency of objective conditions to account for the radicalization of the social protest. His idea of Mengistu as an already committed Marxist is false, not that he felt need to appeal to the impact of an individual to explain the radicalization.

That said, the core weakness of the thesis of the prior radicalization of the Derg is that it does not correspond to facts as we know them. It simply echoes the propaganda that Mengistu and his colleagues cooked up to gain legitimacy by robbing the initiation of socialist revolution from the civilian left. Facts supporting the belief that all happened according to the careful plan of an underground group of revolutionary officers are hard to assemble. Likewise, Vivo's statement on the revolutionary potential of the uprising of the working people seems highly exaggerated. As already indicated, their demands were mostly corporatist and, at best, confined to liberal rights; they were not revolutionary in the sense of questioning the class structure of the society and its ideological apparatus. Properly revolutionary demands came first and foremost from students and intellectuals.

To reject Vivo's thesis is not to deny the existence of radicalized military officers. Many young officers were exposed to radical ideas when they were students. What is less certain, however, is whether the officers who became members of the Derg were as radicalized as Vivo and Thomson said they were. Even if we grant that radical officers had planned everything, by asking the various military units to send elected representatives, they run the risk of creating a committee with different ideological commitments. Having no local control over the candidates and the conduct of the election, the probability that they could get a majority of members sharing their ideological commitment was actually close to zero. In effect, NCOs and privates formed the majority of the Derg, with most members having only a vague idea of socialism. Even among the young officers, the majority did not seem to have any prior record of political militancy. A great number of testimonies of people who were close to the Derg indicate that its first meetings were very confused, as most members did not exactly know what they were supposed to do.¹³

These testimonies confirm that most members of the Derg had no radical commitments. Instead, the great majority was composed of people with various political views: some were frankly apolitical; others were supporters of constitu-

tional monarchy; still others had republican ideas. True, leftist officers were also present, but they constituted a tiny minority. Radicals in the armed forces may have planned the Derg, but not its composition: this was the big surprise and the key to what happened later. Above all, Mengistu was neither a radical nor a member of an underground organization. Though it is known that he came from a poor family and resented the prejudices attached to his Negroid traits (more will be said on this issue in Chapter 14), "there is no public evidence of his radicalism prior to the constitution of the *Derg* in 1974."¹⁴ As to the radicalism of Atnafu, vice-chairman of the Derg, it is contradicted by his early conflictual relationship with Mengistu and his stand in favor of a mixed economy.

According to Zenebe Feleke, who was a close observer of the Derg, three different positions have slowly emerged during the early meetings of the Derg. One large group supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy, while another group called for the establishment of an elected civilian government. A third group pleaded for a direct military government.¹⁵ So unthinkable for the majority was the overthrow of the monarchy that the proposal of the first group prevailed at first. The Derg's official support to the monarchy was not, therefore, the unfolding of a Machiavellian plan, but the political decision of the majority of its members, who believed that the removal of the monarchy would have damaging consequences. The decision also defined the task of the Derg, which was one of "removing the obstacles hampering the [reforming] function of the new government while maintaining the monarchy."¹⁶

Dawit Wolde Giorgis provides an authoritative testimony of the lack of radical orientation of the Derg in its early days. Both as an officer with the rank of major and an important official of the military government, Dawit had an inside knowledge of the Derg. He writes:

Most members of the Coordinating Committee in mid-1974 were hardly progressive reformers, and certainly not revolutionaries. The great majority, many of whom were my friends, considered the Committee a provisional body of national overseers, and were not sure what they wanted other than immediate redress of the military's grievances. Certainly none of them wanted to depose the Emperor.¹⁷

Dawit goes to the extent of defining the Derg as "an apolitical body" that was precipitated into the political arena subsequent to the growing sense of a power vacuum and the threat of anarchy resulting from continuous social unrests.¹⁸ He attributes the radicalization of the Derg solely to the vicious influence of "radical students and teachers, particularly those from abroad, who on hearing of the political crisis rushed home to participate in the making of history."¹⁹

Dawit's denial of prior radical commitment is correct, but his explanation suffers from at least two major shortcomings. First, it is excessive to characterize the Derg as an apolitical committee. Granted that the majority had either no radical commitment or any firm political belief, the assumption that they were not aware of the need of serious reforms is not plausible, given the on-going

social turmoil. The assumption becomes frankly untenable when we consider the case of young officers—among whom some were college graduates—and NCOs who attended high schools. Secondly, to put the blame for the radicalization of the Derg on students and intellectuals is scarcely enlightening. It does not answer the fundamental question of why the members of the Derg listened to radical students rather than to moderate students, who were more in agreement with their originally cautious position.

Weak though the explanation of the radicalization of the Derg by the influence of leftist groups is, many people, including important scholars and leftist militants, have made it the basis of their analysis of the Revolution. The preferred theoretical expression of this approach has led to the assumption of the "stolen revolution" and the Derg as nothing more than a usurper. Let us examine its basic arguments.

The Stolen Revolution

The basic assumption is as follows: the radicalization of the Derg is a direct product of its competition for power with leftist groups. So hegemonic these groups had become that the only way by which the Derg could hope to gain legitimacy in its bid for power was through the adoption of their ideology and program of social change. Yohannis Abate puts the matter thus:

It is my contention that the radicalization of the PMAC was not of its own making, but of civilian groups, mainly radical university graduates, students, teachers and younger members of the bureaucracy, just as the movement to undermine the imperial system was initiated and spearheaded by them.²⁰

Under the pressure of civilian leftist groups, the original mildly reformist and nationalist stand of *Ethiopia Tikedem* was changed into Ethiopian socialism. But when students and intellectuals rejected Ethiopian socialism, the Derg decidedly moved toward Marxism-Leninism and on December 20, 1975, adopted scientific socialism as the guiding ideology of the Ethiopian Revolution.

The main purpose of these ideological transformations was to gain the support of the civilian left so that "the most powerful factor in the radicalization of the PMAC was the existence of a large, well organized group of highly educated individuals who were members of the Ethiopian student movement in Ethiopia, Europe and North America."²¹ The pressure for radicalization became all the stronger as the rivalry between the Derg and the EPRP, the main leftist civilian opposition, intensified. This competition against a radical civilian opposition over the leadership of the Revolution "was important in the introduction of radical reforms."²² In short, the Derg radicalized to outdo the civilian left.

Andargachew Tiruneh provides a more complete and sophisticated explanation of radicalization through political rivalry. For him, the weakening of the imperial regime and the problems it faced did not necessarily imply a socialist revolution: a liberal solution was possible. The observation invalidates any at-

tempt to derive radicalization from the pressure of structural conditions, be it the radicalization of civilian or military groups. He also underlines that the Revolution involved a small minority: given the absence of the peasantry, the uprising involved "the 'urban' residents who numbered about 3 million out of a total population of almost 32 million. Of these, it was only the civil servants, industrial workers, the army and the students who took an active part in the protest movement."²³ This restricted protest lessens the impact of class struggle and hence defies the explanation attributing the engagement in a socialist revolution to the pressure of the working masses. In other words, though serious and multifarious problems hampered the Ethiopian society, mostly stemming from the long postponement of necessary reforms, they did not call for a socialist revolution.

If the objective conditions did not require a socialist program, then what persuaded the Derg to embrace the socialist ideology? The quest for legitimacy, more exactly, the need to steal the legitimacy of the left is Andargachew's answer. Two basic factors maximized the prestige of leftist politics in Ethiopia. One of these factors was the long and almost lonely struggle of students against the imperial regime and its impact on the erosion of Haile Selassie's authority and the initiation of a revolutionary situation. This undeniable and widely acknowledged reputé gave the student movement glory and the attribute of righteousness. Given this ascendancy, no group could claim legitimacy unless it had the blessing of the student movement. And this blessing depended on the adoption of the dominant ideology of the movement, namely, Marxism-Leninism, since "starting from well before 1974, the Students' Movement had established the orthodoxy that to be Marxist was to be progressive."²⁴ The global hegemony of Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s and early 1970s was the second factor that enhanced the prestige of leftist politics. The hegemony was such that a large number of Third-World intellectuals, political parties, and governments professed socialist ideas and believed that socialism was the only way toward development.

In light of the prestige of the Ethiopian student movement and the global hegemony of Marxism-Leninism at the time, was there a better recourse for an ad-committee to legitimize its seizure of political power than to adopt the ideology of the students? To quote Andargachew, "because of the preponderance of leftist movements in the wake of the 1974 uprising, the Derg was persuaded to adopt, not only increasingly radical socio-economic reforms . . . but also Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of Ethiopia."²⁵ The need to appropriate the ideology of the left increased with the Derg's desperate attempt to crush underground leftist organizations. The leftist nomenclature was so righteous that the Derg even decided to prove its entitlement by nothing less than the summary execution of sixty high officials of the imperial regime on November 22, 1974. Since the officials were already in jail and did not present any danger to the Revolution, Andargachew finds no other explanation for such horrendous mas-

sacred than to say: "the officials were sacrificed on the altar of the Derg's desire to win to its side the civilian left."²⁶

One major implication of Andargachew's analysis is that ideology becomes the primary explanation for the radicalization of the Derg and hence for the occurrence of the Revolution. He disagrees with those scholars who tend to dismiss "ideology as unimportant on the ground that Marxism-Leninism is a smoke screen for justifying the seizure and exercise of power by the military."²⁷ The main defect of this reasoning is that it overlooks that the need to appropriate the ideology also emanated from the power, the authority inherent in the ideology as ideology. The prestige of Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s and 1970s provided "a kind of legitimacy to rule" to movements aspiring to seize power.²⁸ The defense of the rights and interests of the working masses ennobled groups that spoke in their name by becoming Marxists. Moreover, Marxism-Leninism had a ready set of concrete and practical measures designed to overcome poverty and counter imperialist domination, such as the policy of nationalization. In other words, beyond the need to conceal political ambition, groups adopted Marxism-Leninism because serving a lofty cause carried some intrinsic attractiveness. The defense of a noble cause provides a moral gratification that is not reducible to mere manipulation. There is no reason to think that members of the Derg did not feel the attractiveness of Marxism-Leninism over and above the cynical use to justify power.

Against the Stolen Revolution

Andargachew's nuanced position excluded, a major objection against the thesis of the stolen revolution is the conclusion that the Derg was not honestly socialist. Since it is believed that it adopted socialism just for the cynical purpose of defeating the left and justifying its seizure of power, its commitment was anything but sincere. This kind of position is simply unable to explain the Derg's radical social measures. Had the Derg been content, like so many other regimes in Africa and elsewhere, with proclaiming socialism without backing it by any concrete implementation, it would have been true to speak of Marxism-Leninism as a smoke screen. But such was not the case in Ethiopia: the Derg took measures that put the country upside down and pushed it into the path of a genuine social revolution. In light of the concrete implementations of socialist policy, the argument of a smoke screen seems weak indeed.

The merit of Andargachew is to counter this objection while drawing the radicalization of the Derg from the need to compete against the civilian left. In conjunction with the need to justify their power, members of the Derg had fallen under the spell of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The emphasis on the ideological hegemony and prestige of Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s and 1970s and on its resulting legitimizing power is a view that cannot be ignored. The whole question is whether or not the argument of the moral attractiveness of Marxism-Leninism helps Andargachew patch up the weakness of the thesis of the stolen revolution. The answer to the question is no: as an additional motive, the moral

argument presupposes the primacy of the political goal, namely, the resolution to compete with the civilian left by appropriating its ideology. The fact that, in the midst of their decision to steal the ideology, Derg members felt the moral attraction of Marxism-Leninism does not dissolve the primacy of their original intent. Precisely, what is questionable in the thesis of the stolen revolution is the derivation of the radicalization of the Derg from the need to compete with the civilian left.

The derivation fails to consider the more legitimate question of knowing why the Derg radicalized instead of seeking the support of moderate groups, all the more so as the expected support of the civilian left proved hard to come by. Indeed, the idea of competition with the civilian left makes sense only if one assumes that the Derg had harbored the hope of capturing the support of a good number of leftist activists. In actual fact, the bulk of the civilian left turned against the Derg, even when it took radical measures. Besides, many Derg members knew perfectly well that the civilian left would never admit the leadership of the Derg. Even if we assume that the Derg expected to obtain support, it is not clear why it would continue and even deepen the same policy once it had become obvious that the majority of the civilian left would never come to its side. Since the Derg ended up in a deadly and inevitable fight with the civilian left, the legitimate question is then to know why it did not adopt a moderate platform from the get-go, all the more so as moderation would have rallied the support of a large section of the population and, more importantly, was in line with the belief of most army men and Derg members themselves.

Here transpires the ambiguity of the thesis of the stolen revolution, including that of Andargachew. On the one hand, the thesis maintains that the Derg radicalized in order to win the support of the civilian left; on the other, it presents them as harsh rivals involved in a deadly battle for power. Why would the Derg want to win the support of a group that it knew to be an adamant rival? If the suggestion is to say that the failure of the attempt to seduce the civilian left turned into open rivalry, then it is better to speak of an attempt to co-opt the civilian left rather than to bring into play the desire to obtain its support, given the absolute inflexibility of the Derg on the issue of power-sharing.

The snag with the thesis of the stolen revolution is that it reverses the order of things. The true picture is not the Derg stealing the Revolution, but the civilian left attempting to take the leadership at the expense of the Derg. The demand for immediate elections and for the establishment of a people's democracy was none other than an attempt to sideline the Derg. Even those leftist groups that allied with the Derg, like the MEISON, did so with the intention of using its protection to spread their own influence and lay the organizational framework for the seizure of power. The MEISON's tactical support and the call for a people's government reveal the civilian left's intention of riding on the wings of the Derg. Indeed, without the Derg removing the imperial government and suppressing reactionary forces, while also protecting the proliferation of leftist groups

and the spread of their ideas, none of the projects of the civilian left could be implemented.

One major weakness of the thesis of the stolen revolution is the exaggeration of the real force of the civilian left. We have already underlined how little organized and united leftist groups were when the Revolution started. Because of the absence of political parties, the social unrest was largely a spontaneous uprising. We also indicated that the military intervened because the absence of political parties had created a power vacuum. Under these circumstances, it is highly questionable to say that the Derg stole the Revolution when the civilian left was itself unable to push it further through the appropriation of state power. The left cannot be deprived of something it did not possess in the first place.

For the Derg to be pressured to radicalize, the civilian left had to possess a significant power in terms of followers, organizational strength, and influence. The civilian left's claim that the Derg radicalized in order to compete with it thus betrays its self-overestimation. A former influential member of the MEISON, Abera Yemane-Ab, even goes to the extent of saying that the civilian left was as powerful as the Derg until the intervention of the Soviet Union. According to him, "Soviet intervention disrupted the internal balance of power," thereby causing the defeat of the civilian left.²⁹ This idea of parity is indefensible in light of the Derg representing the armed forces, not to mention the serious splits within the civilian left. These conflicts forced the MEISON to seek the protection of the Derg against the attacks of the EPRP, the rival leftist group. If leftist groups were so divided that they were set to destroy each other, how can it be said that they were also strong enough to defeat the Derg and conservative forces?

Let us assume for one moment that the left was the real force behind the Derg's conversion to socialism. This thesis faces the objection of knowing why the Derg stuck to socialism after defeating and eliminating the left. Once radicalization is explained by the need to rob legitimacy from the left, there remains the question of why "the Derg did not consequently abandon the false consciousness it picked up to justify its hold on power and discredit its opponents."³⁰ The persistence of the Derg's commitment to socialism requires an explanation that goes beyond the pressure of the civilian left.

Last but not least, the thesis of the stolen revolution rests on the assumption that socialism was inevitable, that the Derg had no other option to retain power than to espouse a leftist ideology. Yet a military committee dedicated to a nationalist ideology and reforms would have rallied large sections of the population, even among the educated elite. We simply forget that, with the exception of intellectuals and students, the country did not ask for socialism, and that "the initial movement in Addis Ababa was spontaneous and uncoordinated, consisting of different groups fighting for their own cause and making demands of the imperial state on behalf of sectional interests."³¹ Let alone initiating a revolution, these protests were not even dangerous to the imperial regime.

Danger appeared when the military intervened and instituted a committee that started to make radical demands. The radicalization of the Derg is, there-

fore, the single factor that changed protests into a revolution, for "the toppling of the monarchy only became a revolution in consequence of the policy adopted by the Derg; if not for the [radicalization] of this policy, the deposition of the emperor might have resulted in little more than a palace revolt."³² Clearly, this crucial role of the Derg cannot be explained by the pressure of the civilian left when this pressure was not even enough to topple Endalkachew's cabinet.

The Derg as Counterrevolution

Before suggesting a more comprehensive and factually supported explanation for the radicalization of the Derg, we must examine the thesis according to which socialism was a disguise for a different policy. The suggestion that socialism may have been a smoke screen lends itself to an interpretation stating that the Derg mimicked socialism, not to seduce, but to annihilate the civilian left.

The position frankly defining the Derg as a counterrevolutionary force gives the thesis of the stolen revolution a more consistent expression. Its advantage is to say that the Derg was never socialist, even when it proclaimed socialism as the official ideology of the Revolution. Far from promoting the ideology and the social policy of the students and intellectuals, the Derg used them for a different outcome, namely, the destruction of leftist forces. In thus "obstructing the advance of the popular movement in that direction, the military regime was performing a counterrevolutionary role."³³ Developed essentially by John Markakis and Nega Ayele, the thesis also reflected the official position of the EPRP characterizing the Derg as a fascist group. The Derg is fascist insofar as it monopolized power to pursue a counterrevolutionary policy and reverse the tide of history, and did so by appropriating the populist language, organizational framework, and policy statement of socialism.

For Markakis and Nega, the need to find legitimacy compelled the Derg to adopt the program of the civilian left. It thus took the title of provisional government and announced a series of revolutionary measures, such as the nationalization of urban and rural lands as well as industries, with the clear intention of showing that it was implementing a socialist policy. Aware of the legitimizing and rallying power of the ideology of socialism,

in an effort to gain support, the military regime proved responsive to other popular aspirations, and adopted for its own a number of proposals for economic and social reform advocated by the country's progressive elements. On the basis of these accomplishments, it claimed legitimacy in the name of revolutionary socialism.³⁴

It is very early that the Derg nurtured the aim of seizing political power, while having no specific social program and ideological views of its own. The realization of this ambition required two measures: the recourse to a *coup d'état* and

the adoption of a social program liable to justify both the coup and the continuation of the military rule.

The appropriation of the program and ideology of the left was the best way to implement the political goal of the Derg: not only was the civilian left already most active and popular, but also its social program was so radical, so disruptive that it created conditions suitable for the institution and exercise of a political power controlled by junior officers and NCOs. Spurred on by their political goal,

in fairly short order, the soldiers tried to make up for their ideological confusion and lack of programme by adopting the radical orientation propagated by the Marxist intelligentsia, terminology and vocabulary included, and by appropriating most of the radical programmatic suggestions as well.³⁵

The Derg appropriated the revolutionary proposals of the civilian left except for one crucial component, namely, the transference of state power to civilian rule through the establishment of a people's government, which government Markakis and Nega characterize as "the basic and unfulfilled aspiration of the popular movement."³⁶ The decision to monopolize power while implementing a radical social program was fraught with impending conflicts. While the radical measures dismantled the *ancien regime* and laid the foundation of an advanced social order, the refusal of the concomitant political order through the establishment of a military dictatorship at the expense of a people's government could not but block progress and alienate the civilian left. Accordingly, "the contradiction between social advance and political regression spread a pall of confusion on the scene, which obscured the real trend of events. This trend pointed towards a dictatorship with bonapartist aspirations."³⁷ The sharp discrepancy between the exclusory nature of the military rule and the radical reforms soon unleashed a violent conflict between the Derg and the civilian left.

The conflict between the Derg and leftist forces thus originated from the contradictions between the revolutionary transformations and the political system, given that "the military caste claimed exclusive rights of control over the state and denied a share of power to other groups."³⁸ While the social changes demanded a broad political participation, the establishment of a military dictatorship blocked the participation and hence the conditions of success of the Revolution. The outcome represented a classic case of Bonapartism, that is, of a counterrevolutionary military junta grabbing political power to block revolutionary forces. The strategy is to make concessions to popular demands so as to gain social support while blocking the progress of revolution through the political exclusion of revolutionary forces. In effect, soon after consolidating its power, the Derg undertook a systematic destruction of the civilian left, the consequence of which was "to bury the vision of true socialism along with its carrier."³⁹

Critique of the Thesis of Counterrevolution

Sophisticated though Markakis's thesis may be, it stumbles over two major hurdles. First, the very attempt to characterize the Derg as a counterrevolutionary force is not convincing. The huge problem for Markakis is that the Derg was not simply promising socialism; it also applied it in a thoroughgoing way. It was no longer an ordinary military government claiming socialism; it was competing with the left both in terms of radicalism and concrete applications. We know that some of the measures taken by the Derg, such as the nationalization of all lands, went even beyond the demands of leftist forces. To assign to these radical measures a counterrevolutionary intent while they were clearly dismantling the class structure of the country and implementing a new social order is hardly credible.

The second objection against the thesis is that the absence of political parties and, most importantly, the lack of unity and organization within the civilian left evince that no political organization capable of seizing power existed at the time. That is why many scholars spoke of power vacuum. Is it, then, credible to talk about the betrayal of the popular movement when the movement itself was in such an infant state? Was there a need for counterrevolution when the revolutionary forces were themselves not able to seize power? Criticizing Markakis's position, one author remarks:

The charge that the soldiers conspired to steal power is superficial. First, except for a few weeks in the early days in Jimma, power was at no time in the hands of the people; secondly, the soldiers marched through to claim what lay before them and did not have to steal it. It was there for anyone to grab.⁴⁰

What is puzzling is that Markakis and Nega admit the unreadiness of the civilian left. "Complete lack of organization and leadership had cost the popular movement the political price of the revolution, by allowing the military to seize power practically unopposed," they write.⁴¹ They add that "the popular uprising that began in February 1974 was spontaneous, unpremeditated and unplanned. It was totally lacking in organization and leadership."⁴² Under these conditions, it does not make sense to speak of counterrevolution: since no force liable to seize power existed, hardly was there a need for counterrevolution. Stated otherwise, the admission of the infancy of the civilian left actually argues in favor of the inevitability of the military intervention.

Markakis and Nega are reluctant to recognize the blunder committed by the left with its demand for a people's government. In the absence of organized political parties, such a demand was bound to invite a military intervention. In wanting power when it was not ready for it, the civilian left was directly calling for a military coup. As already indicated, the most realistic and advantageous move was to snatch concrete democratic concessions and a firm commitment to hold free elections from the existing government instead of asking for its remov-

al. The preservation of constitutional legality would have made the military intervention difficult.

Such is not the view of Markakis and Nega: for them, the demand for democratic rights would have been "a miscalculation, since the thrust of the popular movement aimed to topple not to reform the regime."⁴³ As already underlined, the claim that the popular movement was from the outset set to topple the regime is an obvious falsification. Moreover, what invited a military coup was not the protest for democratic rights, but the leftist pressure to remove Endalkachew's cabinet so as to establish a people's government, which pressure was bound to create a power vacuum.

If power was up for grabs because the left was neither organized nor united enough to seize it, the reason why the Derg adopted the socialist ideology is no longer clear. Why would the Derg steal the very ideology that it disliked when the civilian left being so weak was not even a real threat? But, one may ask, what about the need for legitimacy? For Markakis and others, the reason for the adoption of socialism was that the Derg needed a justification following its coup, and so stole the popular ideology of the left. On top of overlooking the extent of the weakness of the left, the explanation by the need for legitimacy simply misses that the overthrow of the emperor had provided the Derg with some legitimacy on which it could capitalize. Moreover, if the Derg had a counterrevolutionary goal and the civilian left was really about to take control of the country, the best way to promote counterrevolution would have been to unite conservative forces through the denunciation of the threat of communism. This policy would have obtained the support of the church and would have brought many forces, including from the military, on the side of the Derg.

The suggestion that a shift to an unconcealed and muscular counterrevolutionary agenda was a real possibility underscores the need to pay more attention to what was happening within the Derg, to wit, the power struggle between various factions. My contention is that power struggle within the Derg was one essential reason for its progressive radicalization. Before discussing this point, there is yet another approach that we must examine.

Forced Radicalization

This thesis differs from the idea of the stolen revolution because it emphasizes that the Derg radicalized under the pressure of objective conditions, and hence that it had no other choice but to adopt a radical policy to realize the primary objective of staying in power. Given that the idea of stolen revolution also refers to radicalization under pressure, the distinct message of the thesis may not look obvious. But a closer look brings out the difference. For one thing, the thesis does not present radicalization as an opportunistic move whose consequence is to cast doubt on the sincerity of the Derg's commitment as well as on the authenticity of the socialist revolution. For another, it avoids giving an exaggerated account of the power of the civil left. Developed fully by Fred Halliday and

Maxine Molyneux, the thesis of "forced radicalization" attributes radicalization to necessity rather than to political opportunism.

Halliday and Molyneux concede that the radicalization came as a surprise because of the very composition of the Derg: its members neither belonged to underground leftist organizations nor were known to have had a prior leftist conviction. To the question of what caused their radicalization, the authors find one basic answer: it "lies in the objective factors that shaped this malleable group of officers in the period after September 1974."⁴⁴ What are the objective factors that pushed the Derg, at first reluctant, toward a radical social policy?

To measure the impact of these objective factors, one must stay focused on the major goal of the Derg, to wit, the retention of power. Supposing, then, that the Derg needed some major changes to stay in power, radicalization becomes intelligible as a necessary component to the exercise and safeguard of power. In this way, radicalization is explained not by the rivalry with the left, but first of all by an inherent need of the Derg. In effect, for Halliday and Molyneux, survival was the most important reason for radicalization, for "if it was to survive, the PMAC had to destroy the socio-economic foundations of the old regime. This involved expropriation, a measure of mass mobilization, and the extension of state control throughout society."⁴⁵ Put otherwise, the adoption of a socialist policy stemmed primarily from its appropriateness to the rise and consolidation of the Derg's power. More than the opportunity to charm or overtake the left, the need to establish the socioeconomic conditions of its rule inspired the decision to dismantle the old regime.

Having established that radical measures were primarily taken to create an objective order that fitted the rule of the Derg, Halliday and Molyneux proceed with other reasons that pushed the Derg toward radicalization:

The first was the pressure from the population: from the peasantry, for land reform, and from the mass of urban poor, wage-earners and semi-employed, for an improvement in their living conditions. Without taking measures to meet these popular demands, the PMAC could never have survived, nor could it have begun that development of the economy upon which the longer-run survival of the regime still rests.⁴⁶

In order to hold on to power, the Derg had to respond to the demands of the working masses, which required nothing less than a radical policy of change, especially in view of serious problems stemming from the lack of long overdue reforms. The Derg knew that its power depended on the neutralization of wealthy classes, and so needed the support of the working masses.

Here an important nuance transpires: springing from the need to have a power base, the radicalization of the Derg ceases to be a mere affectation. Since it wanted to create an objective order commensurate with its needs, it could not but be committed to the practical implementation of socialism. Speaking of the conversion to socialist ideology, Halliday and Molyneux have this to say: "the rapidity of this change does not in itself mean that the ideological shift within

the PMAC was merely affectation. On the other hand, convenience and some opportunism must also have played a role."⁴⁷ As we saw, one weakness of the thesis of the stolen revolution was the implication that the Derg was not sincerely committed to socialism. The implication is hard to reconcile with the far-reaching measures taken by the Derg, just as it stumbles over the question of knowing why the Derg continued the same policy once it had annihilated the leftist opposition.

The only way to avoid the assumption of affectation is to draw radicalization from the inherent need of the Derg. If socialism is a necessary condition for preserving power, there is room for sincerity in the Derg's conversion to socialism, the kind of sincerity flowing from self-interest. So posited, the radicalization of the Derg is intelligible in Marxist terms, at least from one perspective. Just as, criticizing the idealist method, Karl Marx demonstrates the development of ideological ideas from the process of real life, so can the conversion of the Derg to socialism be explained as an ideological reflex to an objective need stemming from the exercise and retention of state power.⁴⁸

The decision to create a convenient social order brought about an additional reason for radicalization. Once the Derg announced the radical change necessary to stay in power, it urgently needed the cooperation of leftist groups for the simple reason that "the officers who promulgated the reform had no political cadres with which to carry it out."⁴⁹ This need was the reason why the Derg became dependent for some time on the civilian left. In particular, it explains the leverage that leftist groups had on the Derg at the beginning of the Revolution. While the EPRP rejected the idea of alliance with the Derg, the MEISON and other smaller groups presented conditions, which the Derg accepted and honored so long as it needed the alliance. The alliance was short-lived, however, as very soon the Derg engaged in the task of creating its own political party. Still, the concessions made to attract and form alliance with leftist groups have, no doubt, further radicalized the Derg.

Let there be no misunderstanding: the pressure of the civilian left does not mean that the Derg turned socialist to fool leftist groups. Nor does it imply that the dependence had become so overwhelming that it had to accept all the demands of the left. That the Derg has always retained its autonomy is shown by the fact that "in adapting Marxism-Leninism, it selected those themes that served its purposes."⁵⁰ Thus, sticking to its original nationalist inspiration, it refused to make any concession to regionalism and secessionist groups. Likewise, it categorically rejected the proposal to share power with the civilian left, despite obvious agreement on ideological issues and social programs. In addition to underlining its autonomy, this selected reading of Marxism-Leninism is another manifestation of the overarching goal of the Derg, to wit, the absolute control of power.

All the more reason for the Derg to retain its autonomy was that the civilian left was never strong enough to exercise a real pressure. For Halliday and Molyneux, "the EPRP's claim to have played a leading role in the February revolution of 1974 is baseless. It did not exist as a public organization until August

1975."⁵¹ In other words, far from stealing anything, the political initiative and leadership of the Revolution belonged primarily to the Derg. In claiming the exclusive paternity of the Revolution, leftist groups (not the Derg) could be accused of becoming stealers.

There is more: according to Halliday and Molyneux, "the third factor that radicalized the Derg was the internal evolution of the officers' group itself: both the factionalism that beset it from the beginning, and the social conflicts that were reflected within it."⁵² This factionalism was clearly associated with the rise of Mengistu as the undisputed leader of the Derg. Having successfully identified his name with an uncompromising form of socialism, Mengistu eliminated all his adversaries within the Derg by denouncing them as counterrevolutionaries. Unfortunately, Halliday and Molyneux do not elaborate further on the manner factionalism led to radicalization, all the more regrettably because Mengistu and those who followed him were not among the most radical officers. Mengistu triumphed by eliminating officers who were more radical than he was, at least initially.

Objections to the Thesis of Forced Radicalization

Though the analysis contains very pertinent insights, I consider as an important weakness the fact that Halliday and Molyneux mention the existence of factionalism within the Derg without, however, explaining why and how it brought about radicalization. Yet power struggle within the Derg was more intense and consequential than the Derg's struggle with the civilian left. My belief is that the radicalization of the Derg cannot be explained without considering power struggle within the Derg, especially the struggle triggered by the rise of Mengistu to absolute power, as the most decisive cause.

While compared to other explanations the thesis corresponds most to facts and makes sense, it also goes against other factors. The first and most important error is the assumption that the Derg had to take radical measures to win popular support. The assumption suggests that the working masses came up with revolutionary demands. To repeat one more time, the popular uprisings were demands for reforms and never targeted the destruction of the *ancien regime*. In this regard, those who had the most grudges, namely, the peasants, were not even active at the beginning. At any rate, the demands, be they those of workers or peasants, could have been met by reforms, and certainly did not include the nationalization of urban and rural lands and industries. Reforms tainted with a nationalist ideology would have secured popular legitimacy. The ideology of *Ethiopia Tikedem* was precisely meant for such a purpose. Why, then, was the nationalist ideology abandoned in favor of scientific socialism? The decisive explanation cannot be found in the objective conditions, any more than they can be found in the struggle of the Derg against the civilian left.

The belief that objective conditions dictated the radical measures actually contradicts the main thesis of the book—as reflected in the title—defining the

Ethiopian Revolution as "a revolution from above." Only the demonstration that the radical measures were not so much called for by the people as imposed on them would have agreed with the title of the book. True, by taking the examples of Germany under Bismarck, the Meiji Restoration, and the Ataturk Revolution in Turkey, Halliday and Molyneux show that revolutions from above, which are the work of radicalized elites, succeed when they coincide with popular movements. The coincidence shows that "revolution from above is not so much an alternative to revolution from below as an extension or fulfillment of a mass movement from below."⁵³ Halliday and Molyneux see such a coincidence in the case of the Ethiopian Revolution, since "this most radical of revolutions from above owed its revolutionary transformation to the crisis of Ethiopian society and the force of the movement for change."⁵⁴

The qualification of the Ethiopian Revolution as the "most radical of revolutions from above" may actually suggest that the concept of "revolutions from above" is proper only to the Ethiopian case. Indeed, the revolutions to which it is compared, such as the Meiji Restoration and the Ataturk Revolution, are political rather than social revolutions. Since neither the radicalized elites nor the popular protests called into question the class structure of their society, this very moderation set the condition for the coincidence between popular demands and the transformative will of elites. Different was the Ethiopian case: the social revolution dismantled the class structure, though the destruction was by no means a popular demand. Only in such a case can one speak of a revolution imposed from above in a literal sense. Otherwise, one downplays the concept of "revolution from above" by suggesting that there was also some popular pressure for a socialist policy. My view is that the concept of "revolution from above" must be taken seriously: in Ethiopia, the socialist revolution came indeed from above in the precise sense that the Derg—perhaps even one individual named Mengistu—imposed it on the country.

Another related issue is that the concept of "revolution from above" barely agrees with some basic principles of Marxism, which Halliday and Molyneux seems to follow. First of all, the concept requires that the state be granted a greater amount of autonomy than what Marxists concede when they speak of relative autonomy. For the state to impose so deep a social change as revolution, it must soar above economic forces. Secondly, such a state does not seem to confine itself to the role of representing class interest, since "revolution from above" suggests that the Derg took power, not to serve a given class, but to secure the absolute control of a group over a society. Indeed, if "the prime concern of the PMAC [was] the retention of power," then it makes sense to say that a certain type of social change was imposed on the society to ensure the control of power.⁵⁵ State power is not about serving essentially the economic interests of a ruling class; it is maybe the opposite, in that the power in place adjusts economic conditions to the interest of exercising and preserving power. Such a view is certainly in agreement with Theda Skocpol's assertion that revolutions cannot be explained unless the state is granted a significant autonomy from classes (see Chapter 2).

To conclude, far from objective conditions compelling the Derg to adopt a radical policy, they themselves were products of a political strategy. Induced measures altered the objective conditions in such a way that they fitted the conditions of the Derg's rule. The Revolution did not give the people what they asked for; it dictated what the Derg wanted, even though it was ideologically translated as the Derg implementing what the people wanted. In other words, since the objective or structural conditions did not require revolution, the Marxist explanation is not adequate to the Ethiopian Revolution. Rather than class struggle, let us see whether the primary factor is not competition for power, to which Hallyday and Molyneux alluded when they noted the existence of functionalism within the Derg.

Notes

1. Raul Valdez Vivo, *Ethiopia's Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 31.
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3. Vivo, *Ethiopia's Revolution*, 66.
4. Vivo, *Ethiopia's Revolution*, 37.
5. Vivo, *Ethiopia's Revolution*, 38.
6. Vivo, *Ethiopia's Revolution*, 87.
7. Blair Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that Cut Off its Head* (London: Robson Books, 1975), 52.
8. Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that Cut Off its Head*, 53.
9. Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that Cut Off its Head*, 75.
10. Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that Cut Off its Head*, 117, 132.
11. See Genet Ayele Anbesse, *Ye Letena Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam Tiz-tawoch* (Addis Ababa: Mega Publisher, 1994), 187.
12. Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that Cut Off its Head*, 75.
13. See Zenebe Feleke, *Neber* (Addis Ababa, 1996)
14. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," *MERIP Reports*, no. 106 (June 1982): 7.
15. See Zenebe, *Neber*, 29.
16. Zenebe, *Neber*, 31 (my translation).
17. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1989), 12.
18. Dawit, *Red Tears*, 12.
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20. Yohannis Abate, "Ethiopia: the Origins of Military Intervention," *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 3 (1980-1981): 10.
21. Yohannis, "Ethiopia: the Origins of Military Intervention," 11.
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24. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 164.
25. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 164.
26. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 78.

27. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 164.
28. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 164.
29. Abera Yemane-Ab, "The Defeat of the Ethiopian Revolution and the Role of the Soviet Union," in *The Ethiopian Revolution and its Impact on the Politics on the Horn of Africa: Proceedings, 2nd International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York: New School for Social Research, 1987), 87.
30. Assafa Endeshaw, *Ethiopia: Perspectives for Change and Renewal* (Singapore: Seng Lee Press, 2002), 41.
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32. Käufeler, *Modernization, Legitimacy, and Social Movement*, 75.
33. John Markakis, "Garrison Socialism: the Case of Ethiopia," *MERIP Reports*, no. 79 (June 1979): 11.
34. John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1986), 17.
35. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 112.
36. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 146.
37. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 127.
38. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 183.
39. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 191.
40. Assafa, *Ethiopia: Perspectives for Change and Renewal*, 16.
41. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 154.
42. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 180.
43. Markakis and Nega, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 181.
44. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 5.
45. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1981), 99.
46. Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 97.
47. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 12.
48. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 14.
49. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 7.
50. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 12.
51. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 10.
52. Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 97.
53. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 30-31.
54. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 31.
55. Halliday and Molyneux, "Ethiopia's Revolution from Above," 136.

Power Struggle and Radicalization

Before discussing how various factors in conjunction with a central motive led to the radicalization of the Derg, it is imperative that we clearly assess the role of radical officers. We have seen that some authors maintain that both the creation of the Derg and the subsequent adoption of the socialist ideology were the work of officers with prior radical commitment. Without denying that radical officers were instrumental in the creation of the Derg, my contention is that neither its composition nor its ideological evolution can be primarily assigned to their influence. Though they pushed for the formation of a military committee, the radicals did not obtain what they expected. This setback has a huge theoretical importance in that it complicates the connection between ideology and power struggle.

The Role of Radicalized Officers

The consensus is that while mutinies in Negale and elsewhere raised corporate demands, such as improvement of wages and conditions of work, the first truly political manifestation came from radical officers, mostly belonging to the air force, which naturally had a high concentration of modern educated staff. According to Edmond J. Keller,

The earliest public political act by military people seems to have been the participation of some air force personnel in a march on February 22 led by parents of students jailed for involvement in riots in Debre Zeit. Leaflets critical of the government and attributed to airmen had appeared a week earlier.¹

Some junior officers and NCOs from other elite units, such as the army aviation, the airborne battalion, the engineers and signals units—all of them with a high concentration of modern educated servicemen—soon joined the protest movement. The turning point was on February 27, when air force helicopters flew over the capital dropping leaflets critical of the government in the name of the armed forces.

One of the arguments of authors emphasizing the primary role of radical officers is to point out that the politicization of discontent was the work of units with a large number of modern educated servicemen. The suggestion is that most of them were already radicalized either during their student life or had some exposure to radical ideas as a result of being enrolled in the University Extension Program. The radical officers were thus the Trojan Horse of the Ethiopian student movement in the armed forces. The contamination of the armed forces with radical ideas was not confined to young officers; it also spread to NCOs and privates, since

in addition to those trained as officers in the elite military academies, thousands of high school dropouts joined the army and the police force as privates because they could not find jobs in the civil service. As a consequence, the military rank-and-file was transformed as illiterate, but loyal, older soldiers were replaced by literate young men whose loyalty to the regime was in doubt.²

Conditions prevailing in the armed forces greatly facilitated the work of politicization. Not only did most servicemen come from poor families or peasant backgrounds, but also conditions of life were so appalling, especially for units stationed in remote outposts, that discontent was permanent, as demonstrated by the Negele revolt in January 1974. The presence of a chronic discontent over wages and conditions of life was thus conducive to the purpose of radicalized officers. As the protest spread to other units, it became easy to connect the military discontent with the ongoing civilian uprisings, and this fortified the need for a change of government.

The persistence of unrests in the barracks, in addition to facilitating the politicizing work of radicalized officers, brought about "the breakdown of command as senior officers could no longer expect their orders to be carried out."³ The collapse of the chain of command was a crucial development because only the neutralization of senior officers could open the path to the formation of the Derg.

To say that politicization was easy does not mean that it did not encounter obstacles. As a matter of fact, very soon a conflict emerged between radical and moderate officers. When the first group claiming to represent the armed forces emerged in February 1974, it quickly came under the control of moderate officers. The leader of the moderates was Alem Zewde Tessema, the commander of the Fourth Division's airborne brigade, while Atnafu Abate represented the radical officers. We learned in Chapter 8 how Prime Minister Endalkachew used Alem Zewde to try to gain control of the armed forces through the neutralization

of radical officers, among whom many were arrested. The victory of the moderates was short-lived, however: Alem Zewde fled after having lost the control of his own battalion while the radical members broke away. Under the leadership Atnafu, they formed a new committee "on June 27, after a hasty meeting of a few junior officers, NCOs and privates from the 4th division in Addis Ababa, the imperial guard, the police, the army aviation, the engineer and signal units."⁴ This group then sent a message to all units of the armed forces asking them to send three representatives—an officer, a NCO and a private—with the proviso that the officer must not have a rank higher than that of major. Thus was born the Derg, which held its first meetings in July 1974.

The first meetings witnessed a confrontation between the few radicals and moderate members, while most members, as already indicated, were either apolitical or had no firm beliefs. Scholars who give the primary role to radicalized officers insist that "it was this radical element which steadily drove the Dergue to the left from its original nationalist slogan of *Ethiopia Tikdem* (Ethiopia First) in 1974."⁵ One major implication of their thesis is that members with a genuine commitment to socialism were responsible for the formation and ideological orientation of the Derg. The thesis thus downplays the radicalizing impact of students and intellectuals in favor of radicalized military. At first opposed by moderate members, the radicals were able to prevail under the firm leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam. In this way, the radicalism of the Derg is not ascribed to a cynical and disguised goal to control power by supplanting the civilian left, but to the genuine commitment of radical members of the Derg. According to one author,

The forces that moved to take control of the Dergue apparently believed that they had an ideological mission to direct Ethiopia radically to the left. Their decisions and their activities were verification of their task. They steadfastly adhered to their goal, eliminating and opposing all forces who stood in their way. . . . Whatever its image, the Dergue consisted of a group of men who took power, and intended to use it for the benefit of the peasantry of Ethiopia, and were willing to use virtually any means to achieve their ends.

"Heretical" Revolution

As already discussed, the problem with the thesis attributing the formation and ideological orientation of the Derg to radical officers is that it brushes aside many recalcitrant facts. Had the thesis been true, the Ethiopian Revolution would have been no different from the classical case of ideologically motivated groups assuming the leadership of social protests and implementing changes commensurate with their prior ideological commitments. Unfortunately, this approach overlooks a basic feature of the Ethiopian Revolution, namely, that it was, to borrow Rene Lefort's expression, a "heretical revolution."

Let there be no misunderstanding: I am not denying the existence of radicalized officers, any more than I deny that they initiated the formation of the Derg. My contention is that, as already indicated, the radicals had no control over the

election process so that many members of the Derg were either apolitical or had conservative beliefs. Moreover, we have a host of testimonies indicating that many members were not even properly elected by their units. Some were simply sent by their commander, while others were elected in their absence. Still others were selected not because they were activists or had records of good behavior, but because they were insubordinate and undisciplined or were simply idle or had no specific jobs. Interestingly enough, Mengistu figured among those chosen "because they were known to be troublemakers."⁷

The unorganized and unsupervised nature of the Derg's formation confirms how little its objectives were known to most units of the armed forces, as well as to many Derg members themselves. This is so true that when elected members were told that they were gathered to create the Coordinating Committee of the armed forces, "some representatives of units asked to be sent back because they did not have a mandate for this kind of action."⁸ Various testimonies make it absolutely clear that "during the first days the committee did not know where it was going, what it could do, and what it was supposed to do."⁹ Had many radicals been really elected, this kind of confusion would not have taken place. Mengistu himself was able to emerge in these confused meetings because he made a nationalist speech to which most members could relate. Obviously, we cannot say that the best, the most educated and ideologically committed servicemen were elected and sent as members of the Derg.

The picture of radical officers taking immediate charge of the Derg and inexorably leading it toward a radical program of social change has never been true. All the more reason to say so is that the first major conflict within the Derg was over the fate of the monarchy. Bitter discussions took place between the majority, which was still loyal to the emperor, and those who supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy, and the few radicals who argued for its removal. As events continued to unfold, periodical bloody confrontations replaced mere discussions. These confrontations confirm that the triumph of the radicals had been anything but easy.

The relatively longer time that the Derg took to come up with a vision, amidst hesitations and setbacks, attests to the low level of political consciousness among the majority of its members. And when the vision was finally formulated, it was an expression of nationalism in the form of "Ethiopia First." With a vague program of social change, the vision was not very helpful in dealing with the existing problems. In other words, while it is true that radical officers pushed for the intervention of the armed forces, they seem to have lost the initiative by the time the Derg was formed. Because radicals started the revolutionary process, it does not mean that they were able to keep it under their control.

Those authors who underline the role of radicalized officers admit that the radicalization of the Derg was very gradual. Is not the admission conceding that the Derg had originally very few radicalized members? In this regard, Fikre Selassie Wogderes's testimony given in 2004 to the court established to judge the

crimes committed by the Derg is quite telling. Though he was the long-time number-two man in the Derg following the elimination of Atnafu, Fikre Selassie said to the court: "to most of us members of the Derg, let alone the program, even the term 'socialism' was alien."¹⁰ He squarely put the blame for introducing the ideology on students and intellectuals.

Let us not forget that the term "radical officers" must be used with some precaution, as it does not necessarily mean Marxist or socialist. A liberal position demanding sweeping political changes could be categorized as radical during the early days of the Revolution. Even the demands of the underground group that dropped incendiary leaflets only contained liberal demands, such as land reform, formation of political parties, free elections, release of political prisoners, etc. These anti-feudal and democratic demands, which were in line with the prevailing view among moderates of the educated class, could threaten the imperial power and the privileges of the nobility, but in no way did they advocate a social revolution questioning the structure and beliefs of the society. There is a long way from proposing liberal reforms to spearheading a socialist revolution.

Another factor challenging the view that radical officers converted the Derg to socialism was that officers with higher educational backgrounds were soon marginalized, with many of them being even physically eliminated. The thesis according to which radicals, who came from the air force and the Harar Military Academy, were responsible for radicalization needs serious revision in light of the fact that Holeta graduates and NCOs, who did not even finish high schools, largely supplanted them. Apart from those few who swore complete allegiance to Mengistu, like Berhanu Baye and Fisseha Desta, "the higher officers who graduated from the Harar Military Academy were progressively sidelined."¹¹

The marginalization of radical officers reveals another anomaly, namely, that more than the conflict with the nobility, the fierce struggle between leftist forces predominantly defines the Ethiopian Revolution. As the core leadership of the Derg was steadily moving toward the left, it "at the same time identified and systematically eliminated the cadres of revolutionary leadership, both inside the armed forces and among the civilian left. All this was done in the name of the revolution."¹² This systematic elimination of leftist forces is the main reason why scholars have difficulty in determining the nature of the Derg. Though it took measures that are undeniably revolutionary, the liquidation of leftist forces revealed its reactionary side. We have also seen that some authors even speak of fascism, the suggestion being that, far from being genuine, the Derg's conversion to socialism was a ploy to eliminate the left.

What these deadly conflicts strongly underline is that power struggle more than anything else was the main outcome of the social uprising of 1974. The collapse of the traditional order in a context defined by the absence of political parties led to so unprecedented a power vacuum that it opened up an all-out competition for the control of the state. Let us see whether the unleashing of a situation of outright power struggle does not better explain the posterior radicalization of the Derg. My claim is that such a power struggle was so indeterminate

that it was propitious to all kinds of developments, including extremist political positions.

The Nature of the Derg

The most predictable political program and ideological stand of the Derg was the nationalist manifesto of *Ethiopia Tikdem*. Without doubt, the manifesto resulted from a serious debate in which the view of the majority prevailed, just as it expressed a standpoint most natural to the military. Moreover, it was the first political manifesto of the Derg: as such, it expressed its decision to conquer and retain power by overcoming the lack of legitimacy associated with the fact that it was a provisional committee formed for the specific purpose of supporting governmental reforms and protecting social peace. It did not have the mandate to rule; nor was it able to govern so long as it was not united around an ideological outlook and a clear program of action.

The promulgation of the manifesto of *Ethiopia Tikdem* announced the transition from a supporting role to the determination to control power. When the Derg members expressed their platform of "Ethiopia First" in July, not only were they contesting the primacy of the emperor over the people, but they were also establishing their own legitimacy, the very one that justified their new political ambition. The ideology of "Ethiopia First" was indicative of the autonomy of the Derg and of its effort to define its own ruling principles. Being neither leftist nor conservative, these principles, however confused and unclear they may have been, announced the Derg's resolution to become a ruling body.

The key to understanding the process of radicalization is to explain why the Derg did not stick to a nationalist ideology. We have already said that the interpretation according to which the Derg abandoned its initial nationalist standpoint under the pressure of the civilian left is not enough. Equally unsatisfying is the explanation assigning radicalization to radicalized members of the Derg. In order to find a satisfactory explanation, we must examine closely the nature of the Derg.

Emphasis must be put on the unusual character of the Derg. Though the Derg planned and realized a military coup—a phenomenon that had become almost banal, especially in the African continent—the act is patently unique as well as anomalous. Usually, high-ranking officers and infrequently junior officers carry out military coups. What is unique about the Derg, however, is that a representative body that emanated from an "electoral" process executed the coup. "It was an unusual body in that coups are generally conducted by particular units or strata of the military, but the Dergue consisted of 108 men of various ranks and from different units. It was thus an unusually representative body," notes one author.¹³ The unique role that the Derg played in the Ethiopian Revolution originated from this unusual character. Not only was it an atypical body, but the way the coup was realized was also abnormal. Military coups happen suddenly and in a concealed way; the Derg's coup occurred progressively and

overtly, with no element of surprise. Some authors speak of a "creeping coup" to express the curious spectacle of putschists taking control of the state by gradual and overt measures.

The creeping nature of the coup reveals the Derg's ideological uncertainty and progression resulting from the fact that, as an outcome of unorganized elections, it brought together people with different ranks and educational backgrounds, but also with dissimilar political beliefs, the majority having no definite belief at all. Except for some commitment to a vague nationalism, what best defined the Derg was thus ideological availability or malleability, essentially flowing from the initial lack of a clear ideological orientation of the majority of its members. This ideological availability is a crucial factor: it means that the Derg could have gone either left or right, and that leftist ideology was chosen because it was found to be most appropriate to the Derg's determination to preserve power. There was a process of radicalization because of the original ideological indeterminacy of the Derg, which indeterminacy was an outcome of its mode of composition.

Ideological uncertainty suggests nothing less than the chaotic nature of the Derg in its early days. In this kind of unstructured body, the proliferation of conflicts between individuals and groups was anything but avoidable. In positioning ideologically diverse individuals for the control of power prior to the elaboration of a common program, the mode of composition of the Derg had created a body inherently subject to conflicts and rivalries. What is more, by following a principle of formation rejective of military hierarchy, it had generated a committee devoid of natural or established leadership. The latter had to emerge as a result of a prolonged struggle between competing individuals and groups. Speaking of the composition of the Derg and its implications, one author writes,

The PMAC . . . was highly disparate in outlook and background. Its members had different class origins: the officers from the educated professional section of the petty bourgeoisie and the NCOs and other enlisted men from the traditional or peasant sector. . . . Many of the splits in the *dergue* may have had ideological overtones, but they must also be categorized as struggles for power.¹⁴

In other words, the creation of a committee composed of people with disparate outlooks and coming from different social and educational backgrounds and in which the customary chain of command has been suspended brought about a Hobbesian situation of conflicts and struggles, itself calling for the rise of a dictatorial ruler who, we know, will be Mengistu.

Posteriori Radicalization

The Derg's ideological malleability, its need for a legitimizing ideology, and its wide-open internal struggle for power link its radicalization to the resolution to preserve and exercise absolute power. I maintain that this connection provides a better explanation for the radicalization of the Derg than the idea of stolen revolution or the alleged radicalizing impact of radical officers. The truth is that the

Derg, which worked for quite some time as a collective body, endorsed the radical measures collectively and even before a bloody power struggle with the civilian left had developed. The thorough nationalization of the means of production was a collective decision, as no group within the Derg had yet emerged as a dominant group.

The best way to understand how previously apolitical and conservative members could drastically shift to radical ideas in a relatively short time is to assume that radical beliefs appeared to them as the most appropriate method to preserve and strengthen their newly acquired power. Instead of ideological commitment being prior to the exercise of power, the seizure and exercise of power explains the adoption of radical ideas. There is a clear correlation between the various stages of the ideological evolution of the Derg and its tightening grip on power. The evolution from the original nationalist slogan of "*Ethiopia Tikdem*" (Ethiopia First) in 1974 to scientific socialism in 1976 via "*Ye-Ithiopia Hibretesebawinet*" (Ethiopian Socialism) in 1975 reflects the various stages of the Derg's ascent to absolute power.

Here a theoretical distinction can be of some help: taking into account that in the case of Cuba radicalization occurred after the seizure of state power, Mark N. Hagopian suggests the distinction between performed ideology and *ad hoc* ideology:

A performed ideology has been articulated fairly well in advance of the outbreak of the revolution and heavily influences the political practice of the revolutionary movement and its leadership. An *ad hoc* ideology, in contrast, develops gradually during the course of the revolutionary struggle.¹⁵

Indeed, Cuba furnishes the perfect example of a posterior radicalization, given that "the thesis that Castro was a communist 'all along' has never been substantiated."¹⁶ Rather, it is strongly held that the lack of a coherent ideology and the conflict with the U.S. explain his evolution toward leftist politics. By contrast, the Russian case provides the classical example of a radical revolution planned and implemented according to the prescriptions of a prior ideological commitment, as shown by the fact that "Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* was written fifteen years before the fall of the monarchy."¹⁷

The radicalization of the Derg falls under the category of *ad hoc* ideology while the leftist orientation of Ethiopian students and intellectuals belongs to the category of performed ideology. The fact that the Derg's ideological shift occurred after the seizure of political power does not mean that the commitment was fake or insincere. No less than *ad hoc* ideology, performed ideology is inextricably connected to the project of conquering power. Theoretical reasons as much as the goal to conquer power by means of popular uprisings explains why Lenin and his group adopted socialism. If the prospect of conquering power persuades people to adopt radical ideas, then how much more so may the need to retain and exercise power? Clearly, performed ideology differs from *ad hoc* ideology merely in terms of timing rather than in terms of intensity of commitment.

In the first case, the goal of the seizure of power encourages prior radicalization; in the second case, the exercise of power brings about gradual radicalization. In both cases, the driving force is power with ideology as its justification.

Let me hasten to add that the qualification of ideology as justification does not deny its autonomy. As illustrated by Leninism, the prior formulation of an ideological stand determines politics as well as economic policy. It is very difficult to argue that objective conditions determined the path of the Russian Revolution when we know that the very novelty of Leninism lies in making the socialist revolution possible by completing the insufficiency of objective conditions with organizational and ideological supplements. Moreover, a major reason why posterior conversion occurs is because of the normative prestige of the socialist ideology. Especially in a context where power is highly contested, the possession of an ideology with strong ethical and messianic contents can provide a decisive advantage. Ideology justifies power to the extent that it promises realizations that have a galvanizing effect on people.

Robinhoodism and Cultural Legacy

More than the pressure of the civilian left or indoctrination by radicalized officers, the characteristics of the socialist ideology and its appropriateness to the exercise of absolute power account for the Derg's conversion to socialism. The legitimizing impact of the moral prestige of socialism was a good fit for the need to justify the monopolization of power by junior officers and NCOs, the majority of whom had not even finished high schools. For those who overthrew the imperial regime and its entrenched aristocratic class, only the messianic mission of socialism could give them the entitlement to power. The fervor with which the Derg nationalized the means of production and liquidated the landed nobility was nothing but legitimization of its rule through the assumption of the role of liberator of the working people.

For people of subaltern ranks both in the military hierarchy and the civilian society, the decision to overthrow an imperial system venerated for centuries and annihilate its aristocratic component required the expiatory impact of a great cause. Those tasked with protecting the imperial system make their rebellion worthwhile if they do it for the noble cause of liberating the working people from oppression. Insofar as socialism provided this noble cause, it had an attractive value for subaltern servicemen taken with the ambition to become a ruling body by ousting the imperial regime. In this regard, an anecdote related to the formulation of the Derg's land policy is quite telling. Before opting for the nationalization of land, the Derg had asked well-known members of the civilian left to suggest proposals. The MEISON came up with a proposal that the Derg rejected because it was not radical enough. During the discussions, leading members of the Derg reportedly retorted, "we didn't overthrow the emperor just for this. What we want is a proclamation nationalizing land."¹⁸

There is no denying that Robinhoodism more than theoretical transfiguration explains the Derg's conversion to socialism. Nationalization was how the

Derg robbed the rich to give back to the poor; it was an act of generosity as well as of justice that also flattered the nationalism of Derg members. Likewise, the summary execution of 60 dignitaries announced the coming of the righter of wrongs. Other than to say that the commitment could not be as consistent as the theoretical conversion, there is no reason to believe that it was less sincere. All the more reason for not underrating the commitment is that it resonates with some deep cultural prescriptions. Such a resonance helps to understand how subaltern members of the armed forces, who were little exposed to radical circles, did not hesitate to eliminate with one stroke centuries of tradition of emperorship and aristocratic gentry.

In a previous study, I established that the Ethiopian tradition of social order was not based on rigid class demarcations.¹⁹ Not that class distinctions did not exist, but because individuals who belonged to different classes could easily exchange places. While classes are permanent, individuals are mobile. And as new places are not added, reversal is the manner people exchange places: the promotion of some individuals means the demotion of other individuals. Ethiopians call *idil* (chance, fate) this possibility of social mobility by which individuals could either ascend to higher positions or descend to lower ones. They term it chance or fate, and not talent or capacity, because the good things that happen to individuals show how well God favors them, just as their decline indicates the loss of divine grace. One opportune way of social ascension was prowess in the battlefield: a person born a peasant could radically alter his status by showing military valor.

Since higher positions depended on God's favoritism, Ethiopians have found it difficult to immobilize class distinctions by means of human institutions. Inasmuch as high social rank flows from "an act of favoritism which always keeps its secret, power refuses to be conceived as a right inscribed in the blood, as a hereditary entitlement."²⁰ As indicated in Chapter 4, Emperor Haile Selassie was the first to institutionalize the notion of designated heir to the throne. Before him, several individuals used to claim the throne, and the winner of the competition became emperor. Since hereditary attributes protected neither power nor wealth, a characteristic precariousness suffused the social hierarchy. To maintain its high social rank, a noble family relied more on its actual performances than on any other form of entitlement, be it blood or rigid sociocultural classifications. So that, "unable to achieve a hereditary status, the nobility was in need of constantly defending its position, just as it was obliged to accept rising outsiders and falling members."²¹ What is more, the periodical exchange of places was largely expected: it was the cycle by which God, redistributing His favors, promoted some individuals while demoting others. As promotions rather than innate entitlements or rights, higher social positions could be taken away any time.

A cultural legacy advocating the precariousness of social positions could not but facilitate the spread of dissident ideas. The tendency not to sanctify rigid class distinctions thus greatly contributed to the birth of a revolutionary mood.

That is why when the revolutionary measures demoting high-placed people were announced, most Ethiopians were neither surprised nor particularly shocked. They perceived the demotion as a revival of the cyclical process of redistribution of chance, of promotions through reversals. The Marxist notion of social revolution could not encounter strong resistance in a culture prone to thinking that new promotions must be done at the expense of the higher-ups. Granted that most members of the Derg were alien to socialist ideas and little educated, the fact of belonging to a culture that teaches the precariousness of power and wealth has, no doubt, been instrumental in their speedy radicalization. For them, revolution meant the coming of the inevitable social reshuffling.

Far be it from me to suggest that cultural affinity is enough to explain the radicalization of the Derg. For the affinity to crystallize, other factors must intervene, the most important being the correlation between power and ideology. The conclusive way to study the process of crystallization is to show that the various stages of radicalization do correspond to the Derg's gradual ascent to absolute power. This ascent also exhibited the gradual weakening of the collectiveness of the Derg in favor first of a dominant group and then of one rising member. Paradoxical though this weakening of the Derg in its march toward absolute power may seem to be, it simply states the bare truth that the only way by which the Derg could survive and achieve absolute power was through its subordination to the dictatorial rule of one of its members. The power struggle implanted at the time of its inception could not but lead to one man's rule.

From Nationalism to Socialism

Before expounding the impact of power struggle on radicalization, let me first deal with the quest for legitimacy. We have already indicated that many authors argue that the Derg opted for socialism because it lacked legitimacy. Though the Derg had the power of violence, it lacked legitimacy, given that it had neither a historical claim to power nor an entitlement derived from the leadership of a social movement (not to mention its impromptu appearance). Having decided to remove the monarchy, the Derg needed a new and popular discourse to have the support of both the noisy left and the working people.

At first the Derg attempted to obtain the much-needed legitimacy by proclaiming the nationalist ideology of "Ethiopia First." But the ideology was not attractive; it lacked "elaboration" and "universality."²² It accordingly resorted to the ideology popularized by the civilian left (i.e. socialism). However, as socialism was a borrowed ideology, the Derg had to show bold initiatives to use socialism as a legitimizing ideology. So it announced and implemented a radical land reform whose outcome was that it acquired "some form of revolutionary legitimacy."²³

As already indicated, the assumption that the Derg radicalized because it needed legitimacy, though not false, has one major defect. It exaggerates the impact of the civilian left to the point of suggesting that socialism had a wide popular support. I maintain that socialist legitimacy was not necessary for the

reason that socialism was not the demand of the majority of people. An ideological outlook confers legitimacy if it reflects the demands of a large number of people. As we shall see later, socialism was rather imposed on the society because it was necessary to the Derg for various reasons. Moreover, since the acquisition of socialist legitimacy exclusively concerned the civilian left, the fact that, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the most important faction of the civilian left utterly refused to recognize any progressive attribute to the Derg invalidates the argument.

In terms of wide support and relevance, the original nationalist and reformist program of "*Ethiopia Tikdem*" was better suited than the Leninist idea of socialism. Also, let us not forget that the merit of overthrowing the monarchy and putting in jail corrupt officials was a big plus that the Derg could have used, together with some relevant but moderate reforms, to obtain legitimacy. In other words, there was a definite quest for legitimacy, but it needed not be socialist. A nationalist ideology accompanied with some relevant reforms could have done the job of conferring legitimacy.

Rather than the need to seduce or fool the civilian opposition, one important reason for radicalization transpires when we understand that, of all the changes that the Derg could have introduced, the least suitable for its survival were reforms establishing democratic rights, such as freedom of expression and organization. Accordingly, the Derg's main concern was less the issue of legitimacy than the imperative of exercising absolute power for the simple reason that absolute power conditioned survival. The concern was about the justification of a specific type of power rather than power as such. Obviously, what the Derg members liked most about the ideological and sociopolitical premises of Leninism was its suitability to achieve absolute control.

Given that a nationalist ideology backed by reforms would have satisfied the majority of Ethiopians, the question we must ask is why it became increasingly insufficient to the needs of the Derg. The radicalization of the Derg must be associated with its growing ambition to monopolize power. Most Derg members instinctively understood that their ability to retain power was dependent on the neutralization of all other competing social groups. These included the old aristocracy, the landed class, the bureaucrats, and the educated middle class. Most of all, fierce competition came from among the military, notably from senior officers, officers of elite units, and those who graduated from elite military schools. The shift from the nationalist platform to socialism is thus better explained if it is established that the ideology of *Ethiopia Tikdem* would not have allowed the Derg to survive as a ruling body.

The explanation does not disregard the role of radical officers within the Derg; it simply says that they became influential to the extent that what they said supported the secret wish of the majority. Likewise, the role of the civilian left was not entirely negligible: the popularization of socialism among the educated elite was an important factor, just as the Derg's attempt to co-opt leftist groups was another contributing factor. But these factors of radicalization must be

placed in the proper context defined by the Derg's central question on the best strategy to retain power.

Although a reformist nationalism would have been a more suitable legitimizing ideology, it could have hardly justified the absolute control of power by junior officers and NCOs. Sooner rather than later, other forces, especially among senior officers, would have emerged with a greater claim to nationalist legitimacy. Since revolutionary ideology was needed to dissolve military hierarchy, socialism alone was suitable for the empowerment of junior officers and NCOs. Given the Derg's deficiencies in terms of entitlement to power, senior or educated officers possessed a better standing to fill the power vacuum. Only a Robin Hood-like profusion could allow Derg members to oust their more qualified contenders.

I see no better validation of the major contribution of conflict and competition for power in the radicalization of the Derg than its evolution concerning the use of violence. That the Derg's main concern was more about eliminating rivals than gaining legitimacy transpires when we recall that the initial platform of "*Ethiopian Tikdem*" contained the express pledge to effect change without any bloodshed. The promise of a peaceful changeover was a clear attempt to gain moral authority, and hence legitimacy. But it was not long before the Derg understood that the renunciation of violence was only favoring its opponents so that the urgent matter was less the recognition of legitimacy than the preservation of power through intimidation and the physical elimination of its rivals.

What made socialism attractive to the Derg is the provision of justification for the shift to a violent form of government. Both the theory of class struggle and the definition of the socialist state as a dictatorship of the working people integrate the recourse to violence as a justified means of government—not to mention Lenin's contempt for liberal rights, which he characterizes as bourgeois rights. Without the socialist ideology, the use of a violent method of government, so necessary to retain power, would have uncovered the Derg's exclusive obsession with power. This, in turn, would have considerably reduced the willingness of the military, especially of ordinary soldiers, to become an instrument of a policy of violence. The moralization of violence as a protection of the interests of the poor against their class enemies provided a lofty camouflage to what was but a fight to eliminate rival groups. Any opponent could be categorized as reactionary and eliminated without further ado.

The Derg's Initial Vulnerability

The very fragility of the Derg further validates the explanation that political competition rather than the quest for legitimacy radicalized the Derg. From the moment of its inception, the fate of the Derg looked highly precarious, not only because of the leftist opposition, but primarily because of the opposition from within the armed forces. One author writes,

No one expected the Dergue to last so long. It was a common thing to wager on its imminent collapse, particularly in view of the number and variety of its enemies, the complexity of the empire it had inherited, and its several blunders in meeting some of the challenges.²⁴

The military opposition grew as it became increasingly clear that Derg members had decided to perpetuate their provisional hold on power. Quite aware of their precarious position, the members were in a constant state of apprehension and vigilance. A military man who had worked closely with the Derg since its early days reports an incident very expressive of their fearful state of mind. While in secession, a rumor spread that the commander of the Imperial Guard had sent a unit to arrest them. There was an immediate panic: members ran away from the meeting room, some even attempting to jump out of the window.²⁵ A similar incident happened a few days later and provoked the same scene of panic with only two members, Mengistu and Atnafu, maintaining their usual composure.

The Derg faced opposition not only from senior officers, but also from junior officers, NCOs, and ordinary soldiers. Here is a characteristic example: paratroopers became angry when the Derg nominated one of their officers, Major Mersha Admassu, vice-chairman of a committee. At first the Derg refused to remove the nomination and sent emissaries to explain the decision, but to no avail. In light of the determination of the paratroopers, the Derg had no other option than to back down and cancel the nomination.²⁶

The more the Derg showed signs of its ambition to stay in power, the larger became the opposition. Fellow officers and NCOs started to agitate for the dissolution of the Derg because they were either taken by jealousy or honestly thought that their colleagues were not capable of assuming such a big responsibility. An interesting outcome of this agitation was that Mengistu was called backed by his own unit.²⁷ Especially elite units, such as the army aviation, the airborne battalion, the engineers and signals units, had trouble accepting the political ambition of the Derg. The military opposition became a serious threat when various committees, known as "junior committees" in the units—these committees were later disbanded—openly demanded the dissolution of the Derg.²⁸ Members of the Derg had to go back to their units and explain what they were doing.

Add to this the open hostility of the Imperial Guard, which was most dangerous because it was well-trained and disciplined and had a large presence in Addis Ababa where the Derg held its meetings. No less threatening was the situation in the Second Division: stationed in Eritrea, the division began to show serious signs of discontent. The conflict with the Derg became so grave that a delegation sent to Asmara came back without any result.²⁹ The junior committee of the Second Division was accusing the Derg of nothing less than mismanaging the war in Eritrea and bringing defeat on the Ethiopian troops. In the face of this serious charge, Mengistu himself went to Asmara. It took a lot of convincing from him to deny the charge and appease the rebellious mood of the division.³⁰

These are few examples of the growing military opposition to the Derg. This large movement of rebellion failed to provoke the dissolution of the Derg, not because it lacked strength, but because the rebels themselves could not offer a better alternative to the danger of power vacuum. Interestingly, the awareness of their precarious position led members of the Derg to two important decisions. The one was to seek the protection of the emperor: they reiterated their loyalty to him by giving the assurance that their task was simply to protect social peace and remove obstacles to the new cabinet that he himself named.³¹ Far from being a tactical device to hide the Derg's radical program, as some authors claim, the declaration of loyalty was an attempt to gain the protection of the emperor against rival military groups. Apparently, the emperor believed the Derg, and even thought of using it to regain the control of the armed forces. Though later the Derg claimed that the expression of loyalty was simply tactical, the truth was that in the early days it needed the emperor's protection in the face of growing opposition.

The second decision added the protection of a popular general, Aman Andom, who was accordingly made first chief of staff and, after the overthrow of the emperor, chairman of the PMAC and Head of State. In addition to being a good interlocutor for a negotiated settlement with the Eritrean rebels, as he himself was Eritrean, the Derg members "needed his popularity to rally the army rank-and-file behind them, and his skill and experience to steer them through the uncertain stage of the early part of the revolution."³² The General was not only admired because of his shining victory over Somali forces in 1964, but he was also not suspected of corruption and other misconducts. Nominating him as chair of the Provisional Military Government was the best guarantee against internal military rebellions.

Aman's nomination was not without serious risk. Both from his successful military career and his ambitious character, one could easily deduce that he would not be content with being a puppet chairman so that conflict with the Derg was anything but avoidable.³³ Why then did Derg members (especially Mengistu, who first suggested his name), put themselves at great risk by promoting an ambitious and popular army general? Given their own political ambition, the decision to nominate such a serious contender "Chairman of the Derg and Head of State" appears as an irrational and reckless decision. My answer is that the nomination shows how desperate the situation of the Derg was. The only way to make sense of the decision is to say that the growing military opposition left the Derg with no other option than to seek the protection of a popular general, all the more so as no other general was acceptable to young officers and NCOs. Even with Aman's nomination, letters of protest from the air force, the navy, and some ground forces units reached the Derg.³⁴ Emissaries were sent to explain the decision and give the assurance that Aman did not have the power to decide. So that, even if Derg members knew well how Aman's ambition made his nomination unsafe, the most urgent matter for them was to buy time under the protection of a respected general.

In addition to showing that the real danger stemmed from the military rather than from the civilian left, the persistence of military protests confirms that the Derg increasingly engaged in radical policies in order to counter the military threat, especially after the inevitable showdown with General Aman, which brought about his execution on November 24, 1974. With the resolution to stay in power, a growing number of Derg members understood that the ideology of the left was the best, nay, the only way to achieve the absolute control of power. On top of undermining the military hierarchy, the ideology gives absolute control to a provisional committee composed mostly of soldiers and NCOs. I repeat: without a dictatorial power and, subsequently, the recourse to a violent form of government, the Derg could not survive. More than the need for legitimacy, the need to have absolute power convinced the Derg into adopting and implementing a radical program of social change.

The following chapter will provide further arguments in favor of the radicalizing impact of power struggle within the Derg itself, especially in connection with the rise of Mengistu. We have yet to examine another factor of radicalization stemming from the international context that some students of the Ethiopian Revolution have even qualified as decisive.

Cold War Politics

The consensus is that the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and Western governments has had a direct bearing on political conflicts in Third World countries: Competing elites knew that the support of either the Soviet Union or the U.S. significantly bolstered their chance for success or their ability to preserve their hegemonic rule. As an irreconcilable rivalry between two superpowers, the Cold War politics was exactly expressed in terms of providing financial, military, and diplomatic supports to Third World elites choosing to side with the one against the other. This politics of intrusion and selective support had a direct impact on the ideological evolution of peripheral elites. If the aspiring or established elite sided with the U.S. and obtained its support, then the contending elite had to seek the support of the rival superpower, and this meant essentially the demonstration of ideological allegiance to the Soviet Union. In other words, the need of peripheral elites for an international sponsor activated a process of ideological transformation.

According to some authors, the case of the Derg is a characteristic proof of radicalization stemming from the need to have the Soviet Union as an international sponsor. One such author writes that the popular resistance forced the Derg "to seek alliance with the Soviet Union and declare an ideological conversion to socialism. The destiny of the Dergue and its dictatorship were thereby tied to that of the Soviet Union and the Cold War."³⁵ The long-standing commitment of the U.S. and other Western countries to Haile Selassie's regime had already inspired opposing groups, notably students and intellectuals, to vent anti-American position and reject liberalism in favor of socialism. However, the

Ethiopian intelligentsia did not decidedly opt for Soviet support and the Soviet type of socialism. Many radical Ethiopians believed that the Maoist type of socialism was more relevant to Ethiopian conditions. After the eruption of the Revolution, conditions emerged that made the Soviet support imperative.

President Jimmy Carter's emphasis on human rights was particularly disagreeable to the Derg in its bid for power, given that repression was the only way by which it could defeat the civilian left and its opponents within the armed forces. More importantly, in the wake of the invasion of Somali troops in 1977, the Derg understood that it needed a massive military support to stop the aggression, which support the American government was no more willing to provide. By contrast, the Soviet Union was ready to abandon the Somali government, its former ally, and give the needed massive support to the Derg, provided the ideological direction of the country was made to rest on firm foundations, one of which was the creation of a Marxist-Leninist party. In a curious reversal of alliances,

the Soviet Union came to the aid of Ethiopia in its efforts to ward off military challenges from Somalia and several ethnically based opposition movements in the country. In the space of a few months in 1977, the Soviets, Cubans, and other Eastern Block countries airlifted massive amounts of military supplies and equipment and provided technical assistance, as well as combat personnel to replace U.S. military support. President Jimmy Carter responded by vowing to halt the spread of communism in Africa.³⁶

Many observers maintain that the resolution to obtain military assistance from the Soviet Union was behind the ideological shift of the Derg. They also add that the need to offer reliable guarantee to the Soviets explains Mengistu's attempt to unite various radical groups into a single party. The effort first resulted in the creation of a committee to organize the party of the workers of Ethiopia (COPWE), which later evolved into a full-fledged party called the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in which Derg members closely associated with Mengistu occupied the most important places.

It should be kept in mind that the intervention of a superpower sponsor has also impacted on conflicts internal to the Derg. Mengistu was able to eliminate his moderate rivals from the Derg by the promise that his victory would mean the full and unconditional support of the Soviet Union to the Revolution. Seeing the negative attitude of the Carter administration toward the Derg, especially after the massacre of 60 former officials, most members of the Derg concluded that the retention of power depended on the support of the Soviet Union, to which Mengistu was key. Mengistu did everything to emerge as the favored and most trusted client of the Soviet Union. This position, in turn, enabled him to weaken and defeat his rivals, that is, the moderates within the Derg. Clearly, the context of internal conflicts turned superpower sponsorship into an important factor that impacted on the ideological choice of competing groups.

While it is impossible to deny the impact of the Cold War politics on the ideological evolution of the Derg, the attempt to present it as a decisive factor

stumbles over a major recalcitrant fact. Simply put, the Derg proclaimed socialism and took the radical measures before establishing any close alliance with the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, while the Derg engaged in the path of socialist revolution, the Soviet Union was still openly supporting the Somali regime. As one author writes:

The nature of the reforms and the increasingly conspicuous Soviet presence in Ethiopia towards the end of the 1970s should not lead one to draw hasty conclusions about what forces were pushing the revolution: it had taken its definite course before the Soviet advisers came onto the Ethiopian stage.³⁷

The shift of alliance actually confirms the anteriority of the Derg's conversion to the Soviet decision to support it. The Soviet Union abandoned its former client essentially because of its conviction that the Ethiopian Revolution was increasingly showing the genuine features of a socialist revolution. Though the Somali government proclaimed scientific socialism as its guiding policy, it was nowhere near to a concrete translation of the policy. As a result, the Derg appeared as a more reliable client with the consequence that it deserved all the support necessary for the success of socialism.

To say that the Cold War politics did not initiate the ideological evolution of the Derg does not mean that it was not consequential. Without doubt, it consolidated the evolution by clearly associating the survival of the Derg with continued Soviet massive support. To be precise, the impact of the Cold War becomes more visible in connection with the power struggle going on within the Derg. The reluctance of the Carter administration to provide military support when the Somali forces invaded Ethiopia undermined the moderates within the Derg and favored the irreversible rise of Mengistu and his supporters. What ensured Mengistu's definitive control over the armed forces was the massive military aid of the Soviet Union. Not only was such a support instrumental in defeating the Somali army, but it also gave the assurance that the days of insurgencies in Eritrea and elsewhere were numbered. In other words, Soviet aid imparted invincibility to Mengistu, thereby allowing him to prevail over his opponents in the Derg as well as in the armed forces. The next chapter will deal directly with the power struggle within the Derg.

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17. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, 265.
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21. Messay, *Survival and Modernization*, 161.
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27. Zenebe, *Neber*, 57.
28. Zenebe, *Neber*, 58-59.
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31. Zenebe, *Neber*, 37.
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Conflicts for Power and the Rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam

We have already indicated that what defined particularly the Derg was not so much the adoption of socialist ideology, which was quite common with military coups at the time, as the seriousness with which socialism was implemented. That the Derg's commitment involved not only words but also deeds is a major challenge to all those studies that choose to paint its socialism in terms of make-believe.

About Genuineness

Before providing more arguments against the thesis of simulation, let me remind and amplify further my difference with those who argue that the quest for legitimacy radicalized the Derg. I have already pointed out that the explanation does not escape the charge of reducing the ideological evolution of the Derg to pretense. Of course, I am not totally rejecting the idea that the Derg was in need of legitimacy and that socialism was a tempting choice, since both the epoch and the civilian left had turned it into a popular ideology. Nonetheless, I believe that, more than the popularity of an ideology, the Derg's major concern was the implementation of a system allowing it to have effective control of the country.

Legitimacy is of little help without effective takeover, especially when those in charge are considered as usurpers by many rivals, so that the Derg needed, first and foremost, to institute a government exercising absolute power. I maintain that the essential purpose of the drastic revolutionary measures was none other than the institution of such a system of government. There is a long way from gaining popularity by echoing what people want to hear to establishing a system providing absolute control. Because the urgent matter for the Derg was the attainment of absolute power, it could not be content, like so many

Third World governments, with simply talking about socialism without implementing it.

Let no one retort that the need to control puts a question mark on the sincerity of the commitment to socialism. The Marxist notion of ideology as false consciousness actually inspires the tendency to see affectation whenever commitment reveals particular interests. It is believed that socialist commitment is genuine only if it is disinterested, that is, if it has at heart only the interests of the working masses. The reading of the Derg's commitment as affectation means that the Derg used socialism without being really socialist.

The trouble is that this alleged Marxist reading is hardly in agreement with the basic principles of Marxism. The belief that one can become committed to socialism on purely ethical grounds without involving interest or power is an idealist relapse and contrary to Karl Marx's insistence that material conditions of existence determine consciousness. To assume that one can espouse a cause out of sheer generosity or goodness is to depart from Marxist and is a sure way of falling into the trap of affectation. In fact, commitment becomes sincere and potent when it reflects interests. For Marx, the case of socialist uprising did not raise the problem of the disparity between theory and practice because he sincerely believed that socialism would be the ideology of the working class. In such a case, the implementation of socialism has little to do with generosity; rather, it involves a rising class defending its interests and fighting to establishing its own ruling state. In lieu of generosity or idealism, the motivating factor is sheer material interest with the consequence that the commitment cannot but be serious.

Different is the case when petty-bourgeois intellectuals adopt socialism. Rather than the spur of interest, generosity often mixed with nationalism is believed to inspire the commitment. Unfortunately, such a position breeds the conclusion that commitment is not sincere if it is not disinterested. The conclusion is understandable: the undeniable class separation between liberators and the liberated creates a situation where individuals belonging to a different class speak in the name and defend the interests of lower classes. The condition for petty-bourgeois intellectuals to sincerely convert to socialism is thus to deny their own class interest. In other words, what measures the authenticity of the commitment is the extent to which it is disinterested, or to use Friedrich Engels's expression, the extent to which "it appears . . . to be ultimately *based upon thought*," thereby originating from a purely theoretical and moral inspiration.¹

It springs to mind that some such commitment is by definition shaky, there being no doubt that a commitment springing from self-interest is firmer and more stable than the one inspired by generosity. The undependability of generosity explains why many elites rise in the name of the people and socialism but end up by betraying them. My argument is that the Derg's implementation of socialism resulted from the unique situation of a coincidence between its need to control absolute power and a political context severely fractured around compet-

ing elites professing the same ideology of socialism. Far from lowering or erasing sincerity, the involvement of interest (which was survival in this case) forced the commitment to be practical instead of being mere lip-service to socialism. It is this need for practical implementation that surpassed the quest for legitimacy and initiated a form of revolution that is best characterized as "revolution from above."

Revolution from Above

In Chapter 11, we indicated that Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux suggest a plausible explanation for the practical commitment of the Derg when they say that its survival depended on the destruction of the socio-economic foundations of the old regime. The best way to deduce the seriousness of the commitment from the need to survive is to contrast the democratic and corporatist demands of the social movement with the revolutionary measures of the Derg.

As already indicated, the protesting social forces never demanded the nationalization of the means of production. Neither workers nor peasants had any idea of socialist transformations: their demands focused on corporate interests with some references to civil rights and political democracy. Speaking of the CELU, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions, Marina Ottaway notes that "there was never any indication of a socialist trend until mid-1975, after the revolution was well underway, nor apparently did the Confederation have significant ties with the student movement or the radical intelligentsia."² The demand for a socialist type of revolution came essentially from students and the intelligentsia, who had limited influence on workers. In addition, as we saw earlier, even the most extreme proposals of the civilian left did not call for a total nationalization of lands and industries. As Bahru Zewde observes, "the Darg surprised the most vehement of its leftist critics by opting for one of the most radical land reform proclamations that any regime has ever issued."³

If not even leftist groups demanded such radical transformations, the question of knowing why the Derg implemented them requires an answer related to its specific needs. Andargachew Asseged astutely remarks that the land reform could not have been made to "deceive the people" for the simple reason that so radical a reform invited nothing less than "a civil war."⁴ It does not make sense to assume that the Derg took this huge risk just for the purpose of duping people. Unfortunately, Andargachew falls back on the argument that the Derg took the revolutionary measures in order to obtain legitimacy. Such an interpretation does not fully discard the view that the revolutionary measures were simply masquerades. Nor does it explain how measures liable to generate a civil war can grant legitimacy, as they seem to reflect recklessness rather than competence and sagacity.

The policy of total nationalization makes sense only from the standpoint of completely dismantling the old order and creating the objective conditions of the Derg's absolute rule. As Heinz Käufeler puts it:

Marxism-Leninism provided a strategy of development and a model of a new order for the radical military, as the subsequent changes introduced demonstrate. It is hardly surprising that the new self-styled elite emphasized those aspects of the ideology which could be instrumentalized for the maintenance of power. Revolutionary situations require a monopoly of power, whatever else the ideology may promise.⁵

The chief reason for the shift from the nationalist platform to socialism was the institution of a monopoly of power through the generation of a revolutionary, almost chaotic, situation. The Derg created the revolutionary situation rather than the latter creating the Derg. In implementing radical measures, Derg members generated conditions allowing them to retain exclusive power. Radicalization was indeed the only way by which an ad hoc committee composed of junior officers, NCOs, and privates could generate sociopolitical conditions enabling them to exercise the absolute control they needed to stay in power. Through revolutionary conditions alone could the provisional rule of the Derg be transformed into a permanent rule.

An opportune way of extending the provisional mandate was the origination of a situation making the Derg indispensable. Inasmuch as radical measures turned the country upside down, they presented the Derg as the only alternative left. Indeed, once the nationalization of land was announced, a hazardous situation was created that only a powerful military government could possibly control. Reformism, as well as the alternative of a civilian government, had become irrelevant, not to say highly risky. Put otherwise, boldness was how the provisional could be changed into a permanent mandate. Drastic changes put everybody—the people as well as competing groups—in the face of a *fait accompli* that gave no other choice than mere capitulation. The other name for radicalization is thus scorched-earth politics whose main implication was that the Derg became indispensable and the only force that could match the situation. Once the radical measures were taken, there was no going back, just as there was no other alternative to the Derg. The latter had become indispensable by means of a deliberate policy of crisis and chaos.

Since radical measures signified survival, the Derg's commitment to socialism had to unite words with deeds. The Derg could not be content with mere statements about its socialist intention; it had to become the only player by implementing measures that profoundly disrupted the existing order. A scorched-earth politics had the unique consequence of turning the armed forces into a hostage of the Derg. Since the implementations of radical measures engendered a volatile situation, the overthrowing of the Derg had turned into a dangerous idea, all the more so as it amounted to reversing measures that had become popular, especially among southern peasants. In view of this uncertainty, what else could the military do but support the Derg as a lesser evil? Under pain of instigating wider conflicts, the military had little choice but to defend the revolutionary measures. In short, through the politics of *fait accompli*, the Ethiopian armed

forces were literally blackmailed into defending the very revolutionary measures that called for the Derg's absolute power.

Peasants, too, especially those of the south, were cornered into supporting the Derg. Indeed, as John Cartwright notes,

the most striking feature in all this is that there did not seem to be any intense demand from the peasants for such a drastic reform; the impetus seems to have come from the top down, even though the peasants took up the goal with enthusiasm once it was presented to them.⁶

The proclamation of a radical land reform forced southern peasants to defend the Derg because its removal would entail nothing less than a costly reversal. If the Derg were to lose power, the land reform would be either revoked or replaced with a much more watered-down version. In both cases, southern peasants stood to lose. They obtained something they did not ask for, but they could not refuse it without losing everything. Having gained so much with the nationalization, they were no longer receptive to any repealing call.

Even students and intellectuals were put in an uncomfortable and delicate position. Insofar as they claimed to be Marxist-Leninist, they could not oppose the land reform without going against their own credo, even if they knew that such a radical reform did no more than strengthen the power of the Derg. The far-reaching measure had actually caused an identity crisis among leftist groups. To continue their opposition to the Derg, they had to come up with new demands, just as they had to redefine the military regime. Hence the EPRP developed the theory of fascism, thereby giving primacy to democratic rights and clinging even more to the extreme and unrealistic demand of "a provisional people's government." As to the MEISON, it opted for a policy of cooperation based on the argument that, given the revolutionary measures, the overthrow of the Derg would only bring a counterrevolutionary regime. The argument shows that the Derg had indeed become indispensable by a policy of *fait accompli*, which cornered even its competitors into defending the policy under pain of unleashing counterrevolutionary forces.

Nothing of the Ethiopian Revolution is intelligible if one assumes that revolutionary groups did nothing but execute the wish of the working people. Actually, the reverse happened in Ethiopia: competing groups wanted to impose revolution on the people because it was a condition of their exclusive empowerment. "Revolutionaries . . . can only hope to exacerbate it [a revolutionary situation] and thus profit from it," says Mark N. Hagopian.⁷ No better confirmation of this truth is to be found than in the manner the Derg exacerbated social conflicts by means of revolutionary measures. Both the Derg and the civilian left did everything to prevent reformist solutions. The civilian left did not prevail less because it was irrelevant or inefficient than because it was submergéd by the deliberate exasperation of conflicts. Competing groups intensified social conflicts because a revolutionary situation alone was to their advantage. The only difference was that the control of state power gave great advantage to

the Derg: through successive revolutionary decrees, it created the conditions of its own empowerment to the detriment of the civilian left.

Intra-Military Rivalries

Against the insufficiency of the thesis ascribing the radicalization of the Derg to the pursuit of legitimacy, it is fair to underscore that nationalism would have been a perfect legitimizing ideology, given the moderate contents of the social protests. Still, it was not enough for the Derg, not because of the strength of the civilian left, but because the option for a reformist policy would have entailed the dissolution of the Derg. In other words, radicalism was used, not merely to find legitimacy, but essentially to eliminate competing elites.

The conflict between General Aman Andom and the Derg provides a good illustration of radicalization for the purpose of eliminating a rival. The conflict was serious and highly hazardous to the Derg, given the wide popularity of the general. Another equally serious conflict involved General Getachew Nadew who, on top of being the commander of the Second Division in Eritrea, was also a highly determined and respected senior officer. The Derg accused Nadew of fomenting a coup with the complicity of some influential members of the Derg, notably Major Sisay Habte, who was the chairman of the powerful Political and Foreign Sub-Committee. Along the same line, just as radicalism ensured the sidelining of senior officers, it also helped Mengistu Haile Mariam and his associates purge their opponents within the Derg itself.

The more Derg members understood that the ideology of the left justified the use of violence and the monopoly of power, the more radicalism grew among those who had nothing to offer except revolutionary zeal. The conflict with General Aman fully illustrates my interpretation in that it revealed to many Derg members that a moderate policy would entail the expulsion of most members of the Derg except for the few most educated ones. This evolution was the very one that General Aman had in mind with his demand to restructure "the 120-man Dergue into a smaller body."⁸ Arguing that the disparate composition of the Derg made it unable to become an effective ruling body, he suggested the formation of a restricted group that would exercise power while the rest would return to the barracks.

General Aman was recommending nothing less than a correction in the direction of a classical military regime in which senior officers like him would retain power. His proposal openly advocated the dissolution of the Derg; it also favored graduates of the Harar Academy, since they were the ones who would be invited to stay while Holeta graduates, NCOs, and privates would be asked to go back to military life. Unsurprisingly, the proposal infuriated the majority of Derg members, especially Mengistu, who was a Holeta graduate. As a result, all those threatened by the proposal rallied around Mengistu.

Because of his popularity in the army, the removal of Aman was not an easy task. What came in handy was the conciliatory approach that Aman had to the

Eritrean issue. As an Eritrean, he advocated a negotiated settlement rather than a military solution. Mengistu interpreted this as a sign of betrayal and ordered his arrest. A shootout occurred resulting in the death of Aman. By killing a popular general, the Derg found itself in an extremely perilous situation. It needed an immediate diversion: consequently, "on the same night, after a hastily taken vote, 59 officials of the former Government and high-ranking military officers were executed. This decision evidently marked the ascendancy of the most radical faction within the *Derg*."⁹ Indeed, the executions represented a rupture with no prospect of going back. The only path left was one of radicalization, which alone could justify the massacre. How else could such a gruesome decision be justified except as the removal of obstacles standing in the way of the liberation of the working masses? A moderate policy has no business in massacring officials who, being already in jail, were no threat to the regime.

After the massacre, moderate members of the Derg had nowhere to go except to rally behind Mengistu and other radicals. This suggests that the officials were sacrificed for the purpose of, among others, putting moderate members in a position of no return, thereby forcing them to support radical measures. On December 20, 1974, that is, a month after the executions, the adoption of socialism was announced. The series of nationalizations followed in the next few months, including the land reform, proclaimed on March 1975, so that "by the summer of 1975 the most radical phase of the revolution was over."¹⁰ This rapid revolutionary escalation confirms the deliberate adoption of a scorched earth policy as the best way to ensure the survival of the Derg. Unable to stop the escalating process, moderate members as well as all military units were literally towed by the revolutionary zeal of extremist members of the Derg.

These developments clearly confirm that the original nationalist ideology of the Derg was abandoned because it was not conducive to the empowerment of an ad hoc committee composed of junior officers, sergeants, and privates. The nationalist ideology favored the solution of Aman, that is, the reinstatement of the ascendancy of senior officers in the armed forces as well as in the conduct of the government. It also promoted moderation and reformism, and so could not justify the control of power by NCOs and junior officers. Only a revolutionary order could allow subaltern servicemen to dissolve military hierarchy.

Intra-Derg Conflicts

The second but equally important reason for radicalization was the struggle for power within the Derg. The struggle explains the numerous and often violent purges within the Derg and falls under the same exigency of sidelining competing groups through political escalation. The very nature of the Derg was bound to generate recurring conflicts for leadership and power. As already stated, Derg members came from different units and had different educational backgrounds and ranks so that they were neither ideologically united nor had any recognized leadership. The minimum on which they could agree upon was nationalism, which however became insufficient as soon as they decided to stay in power. In

this body devoid of established leadership, the decision to keep power could not but unleash an all-out competition for the top positions.

Let me formulate the main assumption as clearly as possible. The explanation according to which the Derg became radicalized because it was trying to steal socialism from the civilian left, while not being entirely false, is largely exaggerated. The main and decisive reason for radicalization was power struggle both within the Derg and against the military establishment. This is shown by the fact that the various phases of radicalization are intimately connected with the growing ascendancy of Mengistu. One factor that further validates the assumption is that, as soon as Mengistu and his group asserted full control, radicalization came to end and a process of consolidation through the softening of revolutionary extremism took place.

To grasp the dynamics of intra-Derg conflicts, we must go back to the early days, especially to the election of Mengistu as chair of the Derg. As Yohannis Abate writes, it is important to understand the following:

When the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee was formed in June 1974, there was little or no competition between the members to hold important positions, because very few believed at the time that the military would overthrow the government. The election of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam as chairman of the Committee was a very casual affair, but Mengistu used his chairmanship to consolidate his position and concentrate power in his hands.¹¹

Indeed, Mengistu became chair at a time when nobody, in the committee or outside it, thought that the Derg had any future at all, let alone believed that it would overthrow the monarchy. Though Atnafu Abate had a greater contribution in the formation of the Derg, Mengistu obtained the chairmanship because he made an impassioned nationalist speech. Nobody opposed the election for the simple reason that it was believed to be a provisional and inconsequential title.

The position would have remained unimportant were it not for the political ambition and dexterity of Mengistu, who used the position to consolidate his power. Especially, as days passed and the Derg increasingly acquired political significance, the position of the chair became crucial. Together with the growing importance of the Derg, conflicts between various groups began to develop to the point that it became necessary to give the position of chair to somebody from outside the Derg. For reasons already stated, General Aman was chosen to chair the Derg, while Mengistu and Atnafu became respectively first and second vice-chairmen. But by then Mengistu had already established his reputation as a fervent nationalist leader so that many members of the Derg started to identify with him.

The gradual consolidation of Mengistu was the determining factor in the intensification of power struggle within the Derg. The numerous, often bloody, conflicts were all triggered by the need to contain Mengistu's rise, first to prominence and then to dictatorial power. And as from his showdown with General Aman, Mengistu had deduced the necessity of adopting a radical policy, his ri-

vals had no other choice than to follow the same path. All the more reason for Mengistu to carefully craft the image of a radical was that he acquired the reputation of being the one "who had pressed for socialism; his name was on everyone's lips."¹² Witness: on the occasion of a mass rally on December 21, 1975, announcing the departure of students to the countryside for the purpose of educating and mobilizing peasants under the program "Development through Cooperation Campaign" (also known as *zemecha*), students were so fired up that they marched shouting: "Viva Mengistu! Mengistu is a revolutionary!"¹³

Those in the Derg who contested Mengistu's rise were placed in the delicate position of trying to outbid him in terms of radicalism, even if some of them did not even believe in socialism. Such was notably the case of Atnafu, the second vice-chairman: he followed Mengistu a long way even though his commitment to socialism was quite shaky. By contrast, other educated members, such as Major Sisay Habte, Captain Alemayehu Haile, Captain Mogus Wolde Mikael, Major Kiros Alemayehu, resented the leadership of Mengistu because their higher educational background better entitled them to take the lead of a socialist revolution. When the tactic of outbidding proved unhelpful in stopping the rise of Mengistu, some of them shifted to a more moderate position and assigned the multiplication of conflicts and crises to the option of a socialist policy. Clearly, together with the decision to stay in power, there developed within the Derg a power struggle that accelerated and deepened the radicalization process. The latter was set by the unstoppable rise of Mengistu: all those who contested his leadership were taken in a swirl of radicalization unleashed by him.

To fully measure the impact of this power struggle, it is important that we keep in mind that the Derg had remained a collective body until the complete victory of Mengistu. As one author writes:

In 1974 the general assembly of the *dergue* was the major decision-making body. One reason for the slow tempo of the takeover between July and September 1974 was the necessity of carrying the whole membership along with any changes, and getting the corporate membership to ratify all decisions.¹⁴

Even when subcommittees with their own standing chairmen were formed and took most of the work, they were not able to totally marginalize the Derg, which "insisted on ratifying all major and many minor decisions."¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Mengistu's ascendancy kept growing, the power of the general assembly began to decline in favor of the subcommittees mostly chaired by his followers.

So long as the Derg remained a collective decision body, it actually served the interest of Mengistu. Since the majority was composed of NCOs and privates, it identified more with Mengistu—as compared to other officers—owing to his lower social and educational background. Moreover, his political ambition agreed with the wish of low-ranked members: they understood that they had more chance to stay in power with Mengistu than with any other officer. They also liked his radical language, since like Mengistu himself, they figured out that only radicalism entitled them to retain power. In other words, "Mengistu was supported by the NCOs and junior officers in particular because he was more

radical than senior figures and less tainted by proximity to the old imperial government."¹⁶

Intra-Derg conflicts crystallized around three factions very early. The first faction supported the demand for a civilian government and considered the military rule as transitional. The second faction agreed with General Aman's idea of replacing the Derg by a smaller group composed of selected officers. The third faction followed Mengistu and advocated the continuation of the Derg. After much debate, "on October 1, a majority of the Derg's members voted for the third solution."¹⁷ For the majority, the most important question in the developing conflicts was the maintenance of the Derg as a collective body. In the eyes of NCOs and privates, Mengistu was the best possible choice both because of his radicalism and his humble origin. Shrewdly, Mengistu responded to their expectations: he "gained a lot of his support in the *dergue* through championing the role of the rank and file against his fellow officers."¹⁸

Salient Moments of Intra-Derg Conflicts

As already stated, from among the various conflicts, the most dangerous to the Derg as a whole was the conflict with General Aman. As chair of the Derg and a popular general, Aman's dissension could have been fatal. His execution, together with those of fifty-nine dignitaries, announced a major shift toward radicalization and was quickly followed by the series of drastic nationalizations. We have also alluded to another attempt to overthrow the Derg, which became particularly serious because it involved the commander of the Second Division, General Getachew Nadew, and Major Sisay, who was "the foremost intellectual of the Council and the de facto leader of the minority faction."¹⁹

The underside of these conflicts was the deep split in the Derg between officers coming from elite institutions and those who graduated from the Holeta Military School. One author speaks of the "sour relationship between the Holeta soldiers and the Harar Academy graduates."²⁰ Those who graduated from the elite academies of the army, the navy, and the air force had trouble accepting the leadership of Mengistu, who was a Holeta graduate. Other Holeta graduates naturally rallied behind Mengistu, thereby further boosting his position. That the split between the two factions was a basic source of conflict is shown by the fact that "of the 14 Academy officers who held influential positions when the PMAC was created, only two" will remain; the others were either killed, imprisoned, or forced to flee the country.²¹ It goes without saying that through the manifestation of revolutionary zeal alone could Holeta graduates hope to counter the educational superiority of officers from elite institutions.

Another important development in the ongoing power struggle occurred in January 1977, when the minority succeeded in curtailing Mengistu's power by imposing a reorganization of the PMAC. So reduced was Mengistu's position that his function was "restricted to the innocuous one of chairing the meetings of the Council of Ministers," while his rival, Captain Alemayehu Haile, took the

powerful position of secretary-general of the Derg.²² To consolidate further their victory, the rebels invited the EPRP to participate in the political process. What is extraordinary about this development is that Mengistu and his followers suddenly became the minority, since the reorganization was approved by a majority vote. How did Mengistu lose the majority to his opponents?

Fortified by his previous victories and the support he received from one leftist civilian faction, the MEISON, Mengistu started to show dictatorial tendencies that frightened the majority. What is more, he embarked on the creation of his own party, the Revolutionary *Seded* (flame), from which his rivals and other Derg members were excluded. Many Derg members supported the rebel group, not because they liked the members, but because "they were angered and frustrated by the fact that they had no place in Mengistu's Revolutionary *Seded*."²³

Mengistu emerged victorious from the showdown, but this time his triumph involved a *coup d'état* against the Derg itself, since "on 3 February 1977, Mengistu launched his own surprise coup by executing seven of the leaders of the minority faction, including General Teferi Bante, the head of state."²⁴ After the elimination of the rebels, Mengistu imposed all his wishes on the Derg, which had de facto ceased to exist. The majority had no other choice but to endorse Mengistu's coup under pain of sharing the fate of the rebels. Mengistu became head of state and chairman of the Derg. He announced his rise to absolute, unchallenged power by launching the Red Terror campaign to wipe out his opponents, the EPRP and its followers in particular. This campaign of systematic elimination of suspected members was mostly carried out by armed militia attached to the *Kebeles*. Also known as the "Urban-Dwellers' Association," the *Kebeles* were the basic administrative units in the cities. The campaign lasted until late 1978 and brought about the end of the EPRP at the cost of thousands of its members being either killed, imprisoned, or forced to flee the country.

It is important to keep in mind the proper context of the struggle against the civilian left. The EPRP actually initiated a campaign of assassination of opponents; it mainly targeted the rival civilian faction that had decided to support Mengistu, namely, the MEISON. As a result, Mengistu's opponents within the Derg supported the EPRP so that, when the EPRP launched its urban guerrilla warfare, "it also involved the Council members who sided with one group or another."²⁵ At first the assassination campaign proved successful in that the EPRP caused disarray among government supporters and MEISON followers, who in vain urged for a decisive counterattack.

Because the Derg's response was slow to come, there grew the false impression that the EPRP was too powerful a contender. In reality, the Derg did not respond fast enough because internal divisions paralyzed it. When the EPRP launched its offensive, "the Council at this time was in the midst of its own power struggles, making it impossible to predict who would emerge as the true leader."²⁶ Only after a decisive victory over his opponents could Mengistu use the full power of government to crash the EPRP. When after his victory he launched a full-scale offensive, the EPRP was simply overwhelmed and unable

to offer a meaningful resistance. Having eliminated the EPRP, Mengistu turned against the MEISON. In no time, he killed or imprisoned all the leaders and dismantled the organization. With the elimination of the MEISON, the history of Ethiopia's civilian left came to end.

The final phase of Mengistu's rise to absolute power occurred when "the long expected clash" between him and Atnafu "came to a head in November 1977, when the latter was executed."²⁷ From the start, it was quite clear that Atnafu was neither taken with socialism nor ready to accept the prominence of Mengistu, all the more so as he believed that he had played the decisive role in the formation of the Derg. Yet he sided with Mengistu on many issues because, as a Holeta graduate, he was uneasy with the group of officers coming from elite academies. As Mengistu's power kept on growing, Atnafu's alliance with him became increasingly stormy. He attempted one last maneuver against Mengistu: believing that both the open dictatorial behavior of Mengistu and the numerous crises generated by the socialist policy had alienated other Derg members, he made an extensive criticism against Mengistu and his leadership in a meeting held in November 1977. He argued that "the interests of Ethiopia should be put before Marxist-Leninist ideology, saying that he did not believe in socialism."²⁸ Instead of socialism, he advocated a military government committed to pursuing a policy of mixed economy. The death of Atnafu consecrated the final triumph of Mengistu and his followers.

Given the crucial importance of Mengistu's rise, no study of the Ethiopian Revolution is thorough unless it makes room for the role that his character played in ensuring his triumph as well as his final defeat in the hands of Eritrean and Tigrean insurgents. The Ethiopian case furnishes a weighty testimony of the role of individuals in history, since it is highly doubtful whether the military takeover would have taken a radical turn without the power struggle initiated by the rise of Mengistu. As a key to the important question of knowing how he was able to prevail over his radical and moderate opponents, Mengistu's personality is the object of the next chapter.

Notes

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Narcissism and Revolution

Chapter 4 opened a discussion on the role of individuals in social change and introduced narcissism as an independent variable, arguing that neither the radicalization of the Revolution nor its extremely violent nature can be fully explained without involving Mengistu Haile Mariam's narcissistic personality. Our subsequent review of the various conflicts that marred the course of the Revolution has revealed the central role of Mengistu ineluctably moving toward absolute power. My contention is that, not only is Mengistu's narcissism an undeniable factor in the radicalization, but it is also crucial in the explanation both of his rise to absolute power by defeating his rivals and his downfall.

Mengistu's Personality as an Independent Variable

Stated plainly, to say that narcissism explains the slide toward a radical form of socialism in Ethiopia means that the Revolution would not have gone beyond Ethiopia *Tikdem* or Ethiopian socialism without Mengistu. I have criticized as insufficient the argument according to which the influence of radical intellectuals or the need to steal legitimacy from the civilian left explains the radicalization of the Derg. A complete picture emerges only when it is shown how nicely socialism fits with Mengistu's narcissism, with his quest for grandeur and admiration. In espousing the lofty cause of socialism in its radical version, Mengistu found a sustainer for his need of a grandiose self-image and his predilection for violent methods. One important consequence follows: insofar as Mengistu's espousal of socialism has its root in the need to gratify an inner urge of his psyche, his commitment should not be reduced to a mere calculation or opportunism. His socialism is not pretend inasmuch as it springs from an affective impulse, even though it does not have the logical rigor of intellectual conversion

and cannot avoid inconsistencies flowing from its pathological inspiration, as for instance the elimination of leftist forces in the name of socialism. Without endorsing the view that "traits like narcissism and a heightened power drive, whatever their origins, are necessary to sustain a commitment to radical social change" because the statement is obviously too general, it is injudicious not to conjecture that a messy commitment to socialism as the one Mengistu had did not have morbid roots."¹

The other reason for the unavoidability of the concept of narcissism is Mengistu's rise to absolute power. Though many aspects of his life, such as education, physical appearance, family background, and military experience, disadvantaged him in comparison to his main rivals and that his prevalence over them looked very unlikely, he was able to surmount these obstacles thanks to the advantages that his narcissism gave him. Abilities that are typical of narcissistic personalities (such as high determination, manipulation, craving for power, cruelty, etc.) are the weapons that Mengistu used to eliminate his opponents.

The third reason that justifies the usage of the concept of narcissism is none other than Mengistu's pitiful fall. Though he was successful in establishing a political system that gave him the full control of the country, all that he had created crumbled like a sand castle. Notably, the impressive military machine that he had built to the point of looking invincible and which, by all accounts, had no match in Black Africa, totally disintegrated after being unable to withstand the assaults of northern insurgents. Just as everything he fashioned, the army was unable to fight in an efficient and sustained manner because it was undermined by his narcissistic defects, such as *paranoia*, *grandiosity*, preference for loyalty over competence, inflexibility, recklessness, and inability to control emotion.

Before going further, let us deal with the contradictory views that people and scholars have produced about Mengistu. Marc Fontrier gives a good idea of the controversy when he writes: to a university professor, he

appears as a man with great determination, endowed with a sharp intelligence and a very good memory. He describes him as a high-minded person completely committed to his functions, with a quasi-messianic conception of his responsibilities. . . . Inversely, others say that he is a mediocre individual, without breadth and political vision. Only his physical courage, which no one contests, in the service of an unrealistic ambition, opened the path of power to him. Those who defend this thesis underline that he reached his goals by eliminating all his rivals with his own hands.²

Unfortunately, even his physical courage is contested by some observers.³ Instead, I have not found, so far, a view accusing Mengistu of corruption, the consensus being that he did not care about money and material comfort.⁴ The other feature on which there is consensus is his unbridled cruelty, which, for many observers, explains his rise to power. Another feature that most people emphasize is Mengistu's oratory skill, which allowed him to distinguish himself in the first meetings of the Derg. To the question of why Mengistu was able to prevail

so quickly over Atnafu Abate, who is generally believed to have been the initiator of the Derg, most knowledgeable people answer by saying that the latter did not have the oratory skill and decisiveness of Mengistu.⁵

What seems to strengthen the view of those who see Mengistu as a mediocre individual is his shameful flee to Zimbabwe in the face of advancing insurgents. The act gravely tarnished the distinguishing feature of a fierce nationalist that he had carefully cultivated since the beginning. People expected him to fight to the end and die for the country that he boasted to love. Many drew the conclusion that he was a coward and that his proclaimed love for Ethiopia was only a cover-up for his obsession with power. The other failing that undermined his image of leader and strategist is, of course, his military defeat against the insurgents. Though he had all the means of a vast and well-equipped army and proclaimed himself commander-in-chief, he lost the fight mainly because he was incapable of efficient leadership.

In addition to cruelty, those who question Mengistu's leadership ability explain his rise to power by negative rather than positive traits. Among such traits, we find primarily shrewdness and determination, the latter being but an outgrowth of his power-hungry personality. He had one single goal, which was the seizure of absolute power, and he used all means necessary to achieve it. For instance, he created a group of devoted followers and used them as hit-men against his opponents. As to shrewdness, Bahru Zewde gives an accurate account when he describes it as an "inner-city smartness (or what in local parlance would be called *aradanat*)."⁶ This cunningness supplied him with a number of advantages over his rivals. For instance, it enabled him to hide his personal ambition and dictatorial cravings until he eliminated his rivals. According to Berouk Mesfin, "although reputed to be intelligent and hardworking, Mengistu was dogmatic, rigid, vengeful, cruel and authoritarian in personality, and lacked personal magnetism, powers of oratory, sense of diplomacy and political timing."⁷ He was able to prevail over his more educated and able rivals because he was cruel, shrewd, and single-mindedly obsessed with power.

The problem with these accounts is that they do not correlate Mengistu's rise with the social situation and the needs of followers. Whatever be the extent of his cruelty and shrewdness, Mengistu could not have risen to absolute power without the suitability of his personality to the volatile social situation and the specific needs of most members of the Derg. His rise remains a mystery unless the impact of an uphill situation is given a due place, all the more so as it is generally admitted that he prevailed over more educated and experienced rivals. Moreover, to say that Mengistu is a mediocre individual who rose to power simply by his cruelty and his ability to dissimulate his feelings and ambition is an oversimplification that raises more questions than it solves. Not that cruelty and dissimulation are not his defining features, but because they would not have assisted him to grab power without some leadership ability.

That Mengistu could impress people in a short time, these words of Fidel Castro, after he met him for the first time in Addis Ababa in 1976, give evidence: "he is calm, intelligent, bold and brave, and I believe that he has excep-

tional qualities as a revolutionary leader."⁸ Without doubt, this strong impression convinced Castro—and with him the Soviet Union and other socialist countries—to fully support the Ethiopian Revolution, even by abandoning a staunch ally of the socialist camp, namely, Siad Barre of Somalia, who had then invaded Ethiopia. Emphasizing the leadership qualities of Mengistu, another witness who worked closely with the Derg, says, unlike his rivals, "not only did he have the ability to quickly understand events and situations and respond to them, but also he had a powerful gift and skill to convince and galvanize people."⁹

People as well as scholars have legitimate reasons for detesting Mengistu, but their feeling should not be allowed to cloud attempts to understand how he was able to rise to absolute power. Precisely, the concept of narcissism is tremendously helpful in that it integrates the presence of leadership qualities with a self-serving goal, and so enables us to unify the contradictory views about Mengistu. It invites us to see not only how negative traits coexist with positive ones, but also how the former end up by cancelling the leadership qualities. Understanding Mengistu's rise to power is, therefore, grasping how the nature of social needs and the power struggle that followed gave the edge to his narcissistic personality.

The Sources of Mengistu's Narcissism

To recall, the essential features of narcissism are

a grandiose sense of self-importance or uniqueness and preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success and power; hypersensitivity to criticism; and a lack of empathy. Self-esteem, while outwardly appearing high, is actually quite fragile, with a need for constant attention and admiration.¹⁰

The definition suggests that the search for grandeur and uniqueness emanates from a deep need to be admired, which is itself reflective of a fragile ego due to a lack of self-esteem. In trying to identify the source of this deficiency in self-esteem, psychologists have no trouble relating it to a difficult childhood. According to Sam Vaknin, "the onset of pathological narcissism is in infancy, childhood and early adolescence. It is commonly attributed to childhood abuse and trauma inflicted by parents, authority figures, or even peers."¹¹

Under normal conditions, children begin very early to require constant attention and care as a way of building self-importance. Consequently, if a child does not receive love and support from his/her parents, he/she is deeply hurt and tends to develop a low-esteem, which the child tries to overcome with excessive self-love, thereby developing a narcissistic personality. To quote David Beaton, the pathological narcissist is "a person who is emotionally unhealthy as a result of neglect or abuse, with a low level of self-esteem. Their self-worth is boosted by loving themselves, hence creating narcissism."¹² The process results in the splitting of the self, with self-love projecting a grandiose image that attempts to

overcome the wounded self, which is the real self. In other words, the lack of love creates a strong desire to compensate for the deprivation, for instance to obtain the missing love by dreams of grandeur. The attempt often develops into a drive to win love and admiration through power and control over people: unable to expect love or loyalty from other people, the injured self consequently resorts to demeaning methods of control in order to boost and validate its self-worth.

All what we know about the personal life of Mengistu confirms the presence of a difficult childhood that led to low self-esteem and constant humiliation. First of all, Mengistu's family background remains a mystery, as it was not even possible to establish with certainty who his real father was. In the interview he gave to Genet Ayele Anbesse, he rejects the rumor according to which his biological father was not Haile Mariam Wolde but Dejazmach Kebede Tessema, who was an aristocrat and served as Haile Selassie's minister in the imperial court.¹³ In the same interview, he speaks of his mother in highly affectionate terms and indicates that he was emotionally devastated when he lost her at the age of nine. Interestingly, he admits that his relationship with his father was aloof at best so that one gathers the clear feeling that he did not have a happy childhood.¹⁴ The loss of his mother was so painful to him because it left him with a sense of abandonment in a hostile society.

According to another version given by Tesfaye Mekonnen, who used to be Mengistu's confidant until he was thrown in jail, Mengistu's real father is not Dejazmach Kebede Tessema but his brother, Fitewrari Hailu Tessema, who lived in Gojjam where Mengistu was born. Both Mengistu's mother and Haile Mariam Wolde, his official father, were servants in Fitewrari Hailu's house. To hide the dishonor of an aristocrat fathering a servant's child, Fitewrari Hailu married Mengistu's mother with his other servant, Haile Mariam, who thus became the official father. As a reward for the service rendered, Haile Mariam was allowed to join the army instead of being a mere servant.¹⁵

Even more interesting, Mengistu admits, according to Tesfaye, that he had a miserable childhood because the chronic poverty of his family was further aggravated by the father, who was a drunkard and a hopeless squanderer. As a result, his mother was forced to sell *injera* and died in abject poverty. Tesfaye underlines that Mengistu could not hide his anger and resentment when he told him about his father, whom he also made responsible for the fact that he was unable to finish school and had to become soldier at a very young age.¹⁶

Whether Haile Mariam was his real father or not, there is no doubt that Mengistu had an unhappy childhood characterized by a stormy relation with the paternal figure. If, indeed, an aristocrat father refused to recognize him as his son, one sees here the source of a deep hatred against the aristocracy. If the story of an aristocrat and rejectionist father is not true, then the fact that he and his mother were mistreated by a reckless and drunken father may be the source of a profound anger. At any rate, we have here a family background propitious to the feeling of being rejected or abused.

That Mengistu did not do much to put an end to the controversy about his family background is itself quite revealing. Clearly, talking about his family makes him uncomfortable because it brings back painful memories. Another confirmation of his reluctance is the absence of any reference to the constant teasing and humiliation caused by his "Negroid" traits. The usual insulting term that Ethiopians use to characterize the possession of the physical features of black skin, thick lips, and kinky hair is *baria*, which means "black" and "slave." Even after Mengistu conquered absolute power, those who hated him spontaneously mentioned him as "the *baria*." For instance, General Fanta Belay, who was the commander of the air force for many years and one of the leaders of the 1989 coup against Mengistu, is reported to have said: "We are going to overthrow the *baria*."¹⁷ In avoiding any reference to the social scar of his physical features while showing a brisk readiness to speak abundantly of his political conflicts, Mengistu reveals his deep wound. The latter is the key to his political behavior, especially to his violent reactions: they all stemmed from his feeling that those who opposed him did so because they despised him. The excessive cruelty with which he eradicated his opponents betrays the involvement of his deep resentment in political competitions.

As a close observer of the Derg, Tesfaye raises another interesting issue, which is that Mengistu and many noncommissioned members of the Derg came from families in which the father was a soldier. He notably cites the case of Legesse Asfaw and Tamrat Ferede who, together with Mengistu, played a leading role in the radicalization of the Derg.¹⁸ All of them grew up in military camps, with little contact with civilian society, and went through harsh deprivations. As was customary at the time, they did servile jobs for officers, such as washing their cars and clothes and buying groceries for their wives. In addition to growing up with the sense of being despised, they did not have much chance to finish high schools: they became soldiers at a young age because other opportunities were closed to them.¹⁹ According to Tesfaye, destitution and, most of all, the feeling of being despised and barred from existing opportunities may explain the deep hatred of these members of the Derg for the imperial order, the military establishment, and the educated elite.²⁰ It is easy to see how this entrenched rancor can find an outlet and an ideological justification in the socialist rhetoric of the intelligentsia and vent itself with outrageous cruelty.

Instances of Mengistu's anger are found in his behavior as an army officer. His personal files during his service in the Third Division of the imperial army show that he had been punished numerous times by different commanders because of misconducts and a repeated lack of discipline. In an interview discussing his records as an army officer, far from denying the punishments for insubordination, Mengistu interprets them as testimonies of his long-standing rebellion against the feudal order and his refusal to kiss up to his corrupt superiors.²¹ This proud claim of a rebellious past is not so much a confirmation of his early socialist allegiance, as Mengistu has it, as a proof of his sociopathic personality springing from his grudge against a society that rejected him as *baria*.

The exposure to leftist ideas and socialism did no more than sublimate his grudge into a radical political stand. Another expression of Mengistu's tumultuous personality was that, as an officer, he was very often implicated in quarrels and bar fights in which he used to show a high determination to lead and prevail.²²

A different version of Mengistu's family background and upbringing is provided by Tesfaye Riste, who was an officer with the rank of captain in the intelligence service of the Derg. While he was in prison he met important Derg members and other officials and wrote a book based on their testimonies. He does not agree with Tesfaye on the identity of Mengistu's father, even though he does not deny an aristocratic lineage. He also criticizes his description of Mengistu's life in the military camp as unhappy and demeaning. Instead, based on the testimonies of those who were very close to Mengistu, he insists that Mengistu has been deeply affected by the nickname "*baria*" both in his childhood and after. He grew up in the town of Debre Markos among the Gojjami who are reputed, just as many other Ethiopians are, for using the term *baria* to single out and belittle persons having features similar to those of Mengistu.²³ This childhood trauma never left him: his nickname was used by his class mates in the Holeta Military School and by his opponents in the Derg, notably by Captain Alemayehu Haile.²⁴ According to the testimonies, many close associates of Mengistu attribute his "resentment, hatred and inferiority complex" to this mortification suffered in his childhood and military career.²⁵

These facts about Mengistu's life prior to the Revolution establish the presence of an injured self that had grown into excessive self-love, fantasy of grandeur, and neurotic desire to control a world perceived as hostile. These traits would have been confined to bar fights and acts of insubordination if the social upheaval that shook the Ethiopian society did not offer an opportune outlet. Surely, Mengistu would have remained an angry officer with little going on in his life were it not for the explosion of the Ethiopian Revolution, more exactly, were it not for his commander sending him as a representative of his unit to Addis Ababa, apparently just to get rid of him.

The background of a social upheaval set the stage for Mengistu's narcissistic features to turn the formation of an impromptu, leaderless, and politically formless group known as the Derg into an opportunity. Two inseparable aspects of the same situation need to be considered here: (1) the process of Mengistu's preponderance within the Derg; (2) the manner the needs of the larger social upheaval facilitated his victory over his rivals. Of course, the struggle within the Derg and the social upheaval are inseparable for the simple reason that the formation of the Derg and its survival depended on the fate of the Revolution. The distinction between the two aspects is, therefore, more methodological than substantial.

Group and Leadership

Psychological studies show that narcissistic leaders are "more likely than others are to emerge as leaders in unacquainted groups."²⁶ Indeed, in situations of leaderless groups, individuals who exhibit confidence and assertiveness are perceived by other members "as competent and effective."²⁷ Moreover, the narcissistic pursuit of grandeur creates the need to develop those social skills necessary to have followers and by which narcissists "appear sociable, self-assured, likable, and charming."²⁸ As Amy Brunell puts it, "narcissists need others to maintain their inflated self-views and have, therefore, developed skills at initiating relationships."²⁹ Such skills are not developed to cultivate genuine friendships or companionships based on mutual interest; they are part of the arsenal of manipulation that narcissistic leaders use to pursue their own selfish goals. Nevertheless, the projection of self-assurance and likability easily propels them to leadership positions.

The Derg and the rise of Mengistu confirm what the study of unacquainted groups reveals. As we saw, the Derg was an unacquainted group: its members came from disparate social and educational backgrounds, had different military ranks, and were sent by separate units. Of all people and despite notable shortcomings, Mengistu emerged because he looked confident and distinguished himself by a passionate nationalist speech that galvanized most members. Unsurprisingly, the election subsequent to the first confused meetings of the Derg confirmed Mengistu as chair, while Atnafu, who deserved the position more than anybody else, only became vice-chairman.

The emergence of a narcissistic leader like Mengistu becomes even more likely when the group, in addition to being unacquainted, is vividly contested by other groups. One has just to underline the basic inspiration of narcissism to see how it can become compelling in a group facing existential threats:

Narcissists are obsessed by delusions of fantastic grandeur and superiority. As a result they are very competitive. They are strongly compelled—where others are merely motivated. They are driven, relentless, tireless, and ruthless. They often make it to the top. But even when they do not—they strive and fight and learn and climb and create and think and devise and design and conspire. Faced with a challenge—they are likely to do better than non-narcissists.³⁰

What else do these abilities suggest but the extreme susceptibility of a group like the Derg, which was threatened by various forces and was devoid of established leadership, to the presence of a narcissistic personality? All the qualities that the Derg needed to survive—competitiveness, determination, and ruthlessness—are wrapped up in Mengistu's drive for power. Just as people naturally look for saviors in situations of imminent perils, so too the Derg, besieged from all sides, as indicated in the previous chapters, could not but succumb to the leader who best exhibited the traits necessary for its survival. Furthermore, the desperate need of

the group, in addition to laying a favorable ground for Mengistu, could not but enhance those narcissistic traits liable to consolidate his position. In other words,

narcissism may be reinforced by subordinates who, having little sense of control over the world around them, look to and idolize a leader they believe can deal with the helplessness they feel. The leader's apparent confidence and pride fulfill the needs of followers for someone to bring order and stability to their lives.³¹

We know that the leadership qualities of assertiveness, confidence, determination, and ruthlessness of the narcissistic leader emanate from his/her pursuit of self-glory. They are not the qualities of a person committed to serve a benevolent cause in a disinterested manner; they are rather fused with a selfish goal. However, this double-faced commitment is carefully concealed from the followers, all the more so as their own concern for survival leads them to look for a savior. The mixture of the pursuit of self-glory with transcendent causes enables narcissistic leaders both to unify followers and hide their selfish inspiration. What this means is that the espousal of a transcendent cause, which is inextricably mixed with the pursuit of self-glory, gives narcissistic leaders the edge in a struggle for power. It moralizes their personal ambition and paints it with the colors of passion and eloquence, and so galvanizes followers.

According to numerous testimonies, Mengistu proposed the first ideological vision that unified the Derg around a political ambition, namely, the program "Ethiopia first without any bloodshed." It was a clever unifying theme that revealed his leadership ability, the very one necessary to crystallize an informal group composed of disparate and mostly confused members. The nationalist dimension of the theme not only resonated with military men naturally concerned with threats to national integrity posed by the Somali government and Eritrean liberation fronts, but also the program of putting Ethiopia first attacked the hegemony of the aristocratic class while responding to demands for ethnic equality. As to the reference to a peaceful change, it exactly legitimized the intervention of the military as necessary in the face of pending anarchy and violent confrontations. In thus unifying the group around an ideological vision, the theme shaped it as a political rival and infused it with the will to fight for survival and prominence. According to an informant, most members of the Derg recall today and highly praise "Mengistu Haile Mariam's leadership and effort to unite and lead toward a common goal members who wanted change but did not know what kind of change they should bring about."³²

The advantages of the narcissistic personality in a situation of power struggle are reinforced by the practical principle unreservedly stating that all means are justified to achieve absolute power. Unlike mere dreamers, narcissistic individuals combine their dream of self-glory with an inflexible determination that is also free of ethical concerns. As one author notes:

[The narcissist's] ability to form and shift alliances as his personal advantage dictates, to kill and thus permanently eliminate actual and potential enemies, to

establish spy networks, to ferret out opposition and undermine the trust between citizens that might cause them to organize a rebellion against him—all these give such individuals tactical advantages in the raw struggle for power.³³

As we saw in the last chapter, the history of the Derg fully confirms the unfolding of a bloody struggle power propelled by the irresistible rise of Mengistu. No sooner was the Derg united around the slogan "Ethiopia Tikdem" than hostile sub-groups were formed driven by the need to stop the ascent of Mengistu. From General Aman Andom to Atnaflu, whose execution sealed the end of power struggle within the Derg, Mengistu used all means to physically eliminate his rivals.

To recapitulate, Mengistu's qualities were the very ones that the Derg needed to survive and maintain power. This explains why the majority of the Derg's members voted for his leadership, even though they knew how ruthless he could be. The moment they decided to retain power, they realized that ruthlessness was the only means by which they could triumph over their opponents. Hence their progressive radicalization: even more than a touchy nationalism, the socialist principle of class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat came in handy with its justification of the use of violence against not only the nobility, but also the educated elite and the civilian left. To the extent that socialism justified the monopoly of power, it was most appropriate to a group composed of junior officers, NCOs, and privates to retain power by eliminating competitors with greater entitlement to leadership. And who else could lead such a group but Mengistu, who "despises the rich, the well-off, the educated"?³⁴ The coincidence between Mengistu's wounded self and dream of grandeur and the survival needs of members of the Derg and other followers thus set up the perfect scenario for his rise to the undivided leadership of the Ethiopian Revolution.

Social Protest and Leadership Vocation

When we move from the narrow circle of the Derg to the larger society, we find that the advantages of narcissism were equally active to broaden Mengistu's support among the civilian population and the military, especially among non-commissioned officers and privates. The skepticism that many people had about a military regime promising change has been significantly reduced by the presence of Mengistu. Not only did his leadership radicalize the Derg by all possible means, but also his own quest for grandeur infused into his nationalism and commitment to socialism a forcefulness that galvanized many people. His growing popularity in the larger society naturally helped him prevail over his opponents in the Derg and the military establishment.

What was true of the Derg was also true of the larger society in that the unprecedented sociopolitical crisis caused by the massive protests against the imperial regime and the subsequent removal of the emperor had created the need for an inspiring and visionary leadership. The readiness of people for change

had entirely delegitimized established authorities and imparted a longing for a new leadership promising change. The view that "narcissists are apt to emerge, and often flourish, in times that call for a new order to be established" found an apt confirmation in the social upheaval that propelled Mengistu from an army major to the pinnacle of absolute power in record time.³⁵

Mengistu's rapid rise confirms that situations of change provide narcissistic leaders' quest for self-glory unprecedented opportunities. Both their grudge against the old order and their craving for admiration, which, as we saw, emanates from a pathological self-love, propel them to espouse or defend popular causes. What else can better appease dreams of grandeur than when the narcissist "regards himself as the benefactor of the poor, a member of the common folk, the representative of the disenfranchised, the champion of the dispossessed against the corrupt elite"?³⁶ Moreover, narcissists' inner cravings inject into their populist position an emotional force to which people are naturally drawn. To their anger people respond with their own anger against the social order, while their self-love reaches them in the form of an absolute commitment to their cause. Other leaders with similar vision and abilities may emerge too, but they will not show the same emotional intensity and identification with the frustrated masses as narcissistic aspirants. If a struggle for power follows, the likelihood is that the narcissistic personality will prevail, in particular because it will not hesitate to use violent means. Clearly, such considerations expound how Mengistu rose to popularity and how he used his popular fame to prevail in the Derg and among the military.

Let it be added here that the popularity of the Ethiopian student movement and its socialist slogans changed the cause of the working people into a norm that unintentionally favored Mengistu. Since the ideology of students did no more than upgrade his dream of grandeur, his narcissism made an easy transition from his initial nationalist position to socialism by becoming the champion of the working masses. It is safe to say that, without the Leninist discourse popularized by the student movement, Mengistu would have been content with a populist nationalism or "Ethiopian socialism." His injured self and his pursuit of redemption through grandeur and admiration could not let pass the normative discourse of students and the intelligentsia, all the more so as his anger at being deprived of educational opportunities had turned into a hostile jealousy toward the educated elite. The presence of a psychological need speaks in favor of sincerity of commitment, even if the cause was borrowed from students and his narcissism will inevitably stand in the way of its realization. In default of being an intellectual Marxist, Mengistu had thus acquired a visceral commitment stemming from his deep-seated complex of being an outcast.

The situation of crisis, the challenge to established authority, and the socialist discourse of the educated elite favored Mengistu in all aspects. They even changed what could have been disadvantageous, namely, his humble origin, lower educational background, and dark physical features, into assets. Thanks to the rebellious mood of the society, these characteristics made him a bearer of the very spirit of the Revolution. As Dawit Wolde Giorgis writes,

He represented our rejection of past values. He would bring about a greater sense that all Ethiopians were equal, an end to class arrogance and racism. Many of us felt he would embody the spirit of the Revolution and symbolize the change we wanted to bring about.³⁷

In terms of organizational skill, bravery, and intellectual baggage, several members of the Derg probably outshined Mengistu. But they did not have his peripheral features by which he incarnated the spirit of equality rising against the imperial society. Because he understood very early that only the ideology of socialism could give him the necessary means to prevail, he envisioned a happy coincidence between his ambition and the popularity of socialism. His peripheral features adorned his conversion to socialism with an honesty that his main opponents did not have. These features largely compensated for Mengistu's lack of a prior conversion to Marxist ideology.

The power of emotion by which Mengistu impacted on many people, especially on soldiers, came from his urge to humiliate those who have humiliated him and against whose social order people were protesting and rising. The encounter with the ideology of socialism shaped the destructiveness of his revengeful ethos into an exuberant revolutionary leadership that could not but capture the imagination of many people. Mengistu's anti-social behavior prior to the Revolution, which reflected the deep anger of his wounded self, was magically sublimated into revolutionism through his encounter with the socialism of students and the intelligentsia. Other members of the Derg had gone through a similar metamorphosis, albeit not with the same intensity and passion as Mengistu. What was missing was the anger of the humiliated seeking compensation through the pursuit of grandeur.

This personal background explains why, once Mengistu associated socialism with his own empowerment, he consistently defended it. He perfectly understood that consistency was his way to power, the outcome of which was that he acquired the reputation of being the most serious and devoted revolutionary member of the Derg. What gave Mengistu the edge over his rivals is thus the narcissistic ability to galvanize by injecting into his political stand the force of anger and the seduction of grandeur, which in turn spoke for the sincerity of his commitment to the cause of the working people.

More on Advantageous Traits

I reported that cruelty was among the traits that people unanimously attribute to Mengistu, with some going to the extent of saying that cruelty is the single factor that explains his victory. Undoubtedly, Mengistu's cruelty, especially against those who threatened his power, defies imagination. Among the most horrifying acts of cruelty are the massacre of the sixty dignitaries of the imperial regime and the Red Terror campaign. The latter lasted two years and resulted in the killings of thousands of young men and women suspected of being members of

the EPRP. Another case was the elimination of many leaders of the MEISON and other political parties, even though most of them were first allied to the Derg. We should also mention the execution of eleven army generals: reversing the decision of the court martial sentencing them to ten to fifteen years of imprisonment for their involvement in the 1989 attempted military coup against him, Mengistu ordered their execution.

These acts exposed a particularly horrendous form of cruelty because most of the people killed were already in jail and thus no longer a danger to Mengistu. More than necessary measures to counter rivals, they were revengeful acts inspired by a narcissistic rage. These acts betray what is common to narcissistic leaders, namely, hypersensitivity and anger that drive them to be "intensely, vengefully hostile as an exaggerated response to an insult" and feel completely justified committing horrific atrocities in response.³⁸ Any form of opposition revives the wounded self and so brings back the torments of humiliation and helplessness. In letting their rage explode, narcissistic leaders convert "the sense of helplessness into a sense of mastery."³⁹ Destructive, irrational revenge is how they convince themselves that they are back in control, given that destruction, in particular when it is gratuitous, gives them the sense of doing whatever they like, and so appeases their torments by instilling a feeling of supremeness.

Cruelty was instrumental in Mengistu's victory because it was backed by ready-made means. The irony is that the Derg, which needed Mengistu's cruelty to eliminate civilian as well as military rivals, ended up by becoming his victim. Not only Mengistu eliminated his rivals within the Derg without any mercy, but also forced the Derg to go in the direction he wanted by terrorizing its members. Jailed Derg members openly admit today that they were terrorized by Mengistu, especially by his sudden propensity to kill.⁴⁰ Intimidation and terror effectively changed the Derg into a rubber stamp committee, notably after the elimination of Captain Alemayehu Haile and his followers (see previous chapter). Though a majority had supported the idea of reorganizing the Derg, as suggested by the faction of Alemayehu, Mengistu's armed hit-men erupted in a meeting, separated those who led the opposition from the rest and took them in a different room where they were immediately shot. In the meantime, terrorized and uncertain about their fate, spared members were sent into another room in which they found Mengistu, who reassured them.⁴¹

Mengistu's method of terror and intimidation was made particularly efficient by his ability to select followers who were absolutely loyal to him and ready to do whatever he asked them to do without the slightest scruple, the two most notorious being Legesse Asfaw and Colonel Daniel Asfaw. Add to this the creation very early of a special brigade under his exclusive command and committed to his sole protection. According to a Derg member, the control of a special force not accountable to the Ministry of Defense and stationed in the old palace of Menilik where Mengistu had moved had made him invincible.⁴²

Besides violence, Mengistu mobilized his manipulative ability to divide his opponents and form alliances that worked for his advantage. A characteristic expression of his political acumen is his resolution to side with noncommis-

sioned officers and privates against his fellow officers. In this way, not only was he able to have the support of the majority of the Derg, but also he became their champion. Thus, he opposed the reduction of the Derg into a smaller committee, as suggested by General Aman and others, the consequence of which would have been the dismissal of noncommissioned officers and privates. Grateful for opposing the idea, the latter gave him the majority vote that he needed to order the arrest of General Aman.⁴³ Of course, Mengistu defended the cause of non-commissioned officers and privates just until he firmly established his personal dictatorship.

Mengistu's consummate skill at using people stemmed from a trait characteristic of the narcissistic personality, namely, "the lack of empathy" and "inter-personally exploitive" connection with followers and other people.⁴⁴ A pertinent proof of his ability to exploit other people for his ambition was his relationship with Atnafu. Though disagreements marred their relationship, Mengistu did not eliminate him as long as he could use him. Having perceived that Atnafu was not particularly ambitious and, therefore, was not a real threat despite his critical stands at times, he tolerated him because, as the second vice-chairman, he projected a reassuring image to many people, especially to the military. Mengistu could thus continue his ascent to absolute power by hiding behind the reassuring figure of the vice-chairman.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, once Mengistu had a firm control of power, not only Atnafu's criticisms irritated him, but also his presence by his side diminished the full aura of his glory. He ordered his execution following a dispute over the merits of socialism, despite the fact that Atnafu had by then completely lost whatever influence he had on the Derg.

Another illustration of Mengistu's extreme insensitivity to others is the way he treated Legesse Asfaw, his most devoted accomplice in the Derg and whom he knew while he was in Harar. After using Legesse as a trusted hit-man for many years, he sent him to Tigray as administrator with supreme authority, including over the Third Revolutionary Army engaged in the fight to crush the TPLF. Legesse miserably failed in his assigned task and was called back to Addis Ababa where he was simply dropped. What is more, when Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, he did not take Legesse with him, even though all the crimes of which he will be accused were committed under his order. As a matter of fact, Mengistu's uncommon ability to use and drop people when they are no longer useful is demonstrated by the fact that he fled alone to Zimbabwe and left behind all those who had served him so faithfully.

Mengistu's insensitivity increased his shrewdness, notably, his manipulative ability. Because he had mastered the art of dissimulation, his rise to the absolute leadership of the Derg became unstoppable. He would have encountered serious obstacles if members of the Derg had suspected his dictatorial goal very early. One explanation for his rise is that he was able to conceal his ambition, thereby gaining the trust of the majority. By the time members became aware of this true personality, it was too late. Precisely, he disguised his ambition by hiding behind a vociferous nationalism that was further heightened by a radicalized form

of socialism. While he was grabbing one by one all the instruments of power, his discourses so fully identified him with the Revolution that it became impossible to separate his dictatorial ascent from the triumphant march of socialism.

I find no better testimony of Mengistu's ability to deceive than in the book-long interview he gave to Genet. In it, he systematically dodges Genet's pertinent questions about his pursuit of absolute power by presenting a reconstruction of events in which he portrays himself as totally committed to the Revolution and devoid of personal ambition, let alone having a dictatorial design. His reinterpretation completely leaves out any reference to power struggle and explains the occurrence of dreadful events by the sole need to defend the Revolution against its enemies. The outcome of all this is that Mengistu presents himself as a victim, even though the interviewer as well as people in Ethiopia would not give the slightest credence to his reinterpretation of events. That Mengistu continues his dissimulation effort while being aware of the utter disbelief in his integrity prevailing among Ethiopians testifies to the presence of an uncontrollable turn of character. Imagine then how the dissimulative art of Mengistu easily fooled Derg members, who did not have the benefit of hindsight that we have today.

Another expression of his ability to camouflage was Mengistu's humble manner whose consequence was that he seemed uncomfortable in his top position. He even looked embarrassed when his followers threw lavish praises at him. In rallies and meetings, while other Derg members seemed fully content in their new-found position, he looked awkward and uneasy. This self-effacing attitude, which was an expression of his shrewdness, concealed personal ambition, and so inspired confidence. Unsurprisingly, the show of humility attracted a large support, as witnessed by Dawit's report of his meeting with Mengistu. He writes:

[Mengistu] handled his new-found power well, without the least bit of arrogance. I came away from that long meeting very much impressed. . . . Mengistu seemed genuine and more far-sighted than I had expected. In the coming weeks I met with him frequently . . . and my admiration increased.⁴⁶

The consummate ability to dissimulate his true feelings fooled his opponents: many were surprised when he suddenly struck back after he had appeared beaten and resigned. Most expressive of his ability to hide his feelings is an anecdote by Tesfaye Mekonnen. His close relationship with Mengistu had deteriorated; he was expecting the worst, especially after his return from a trip abroad. However, Mengistu received him with a warm welcome, and even hugged him.⁴⁷ Tesfaye generalizes his observation: "when Mengistu wants to hit people, he invites them to lunch or hugs and kisses them," he says.⁴⁸ Another component part of the arsenal of deception was the impression of attentively listening to people. The facade of sustained attention duped his interlocutors into thinking that he was considering and accepting their views, until they realized much later that, as all narcissistic leaders, he only listened to himself.⁴⁹

A word of caution: dissimulation must not be interpreted as a mere tendency to lie deliberately. As one author writes,

The narcissist's lies are not goal-orientated. This is what makes his constant dishonesty both disconcerting and incomprehensible. The narcissist lies at the drop of a hat, needlessly, and almost ceaselessly. He lies in order to avoid the Grandiosity Gap—when the abyss between fact and (narcissistic) fiction becomes too gaping to ignore.⁵⁰

The fact that the narcissistic personality contains a split between the real self and the projected grandiose self, lying becomes a necessary tool to protect the projected self against the challenges of reality. Since narcissistic leaders lie to preserve their own fantasies of grandeur, it is inevitable that they give credence to some of their lies. More exactly, since their lies have two inseparable targets, the one being to impress other people and the other to sustain their own projected self, they inevitably prop up a delusional tendency. For our purpose, we should note that when lies become delusional instead of being merely utilitarian, they exhibit an unusual force liable to inhibit the exercise of critical mind among people, thereby turning advantageous in a situation of power struggle.

The interview that Mengistu gave to Genet is a mine of information about his delusional tendency. The single purpose of the interview is to convince Ethiopians that all the failings of his regime were caused by enemies from inside the Revolution. He failed, not because he did not provide the proper leadership or committed critical mistakes, but because his opponents unrelentingly sabotaged his efforts. He entirely blames other people for all the negative outcomes, and not even once does he accept any responsibility or mistake. Speaking of the narcissistic mania of blaming others, one author writes, narcissistic leaders "nurture grand schemes and harbor the illusion that only circumstances or enemies block their success."⁵¹

Nothing better highlights Mengistu's compulsively delusional nature than his interpretation of the military debacles that brought about his downfall. Though it is common knowledge that, as commander-in-chief, he was solely responsible for the nomination of generals and commanders and for the overall organization of the army and that no one strategy or plan of attack was implemented without his approval—when he himself was not the designer—he squarely put the blame for all the defeats on senior officers. Denying that neither lack of bravery nor inferiority in strategic visions explains the defeat of the army, Mengistu gives a general assessment according to which the support of traitors—he uses the expression "Trojan horse"—gave victory to the TPLF and the EPLF.⁵² Chief among the traitors are senior officers who, in addition to using all means to sabotage the efforts of the army, were also mostly incompetent. Thus, Mengistu explains the debacle of the much advertised Red Star Campaign, whose main objective was to dislodge the EPLF from its fortified base in the Sahel, by the inability of his generals to deal with the changing nature of a war zone.⁵³

Mengistu blames his generals when numerous testimonies amassed since then show that his reluctance to listen to advices and his inflexibility caused the military debacles. Such traits directly emanated from his delusion of grandeur, from the conviction that he is a great military strategist destined to prevail over all his enemies. Be it noted that his delusional nature served him well for some time, since by blaming commanders and generals, he was able to hide his own inefficiency and rigidity to his cadres and the troops. Most of all, he created tension and a wall of suspicion between them and senior officers, the very tension that he needed to avoid rebellions among the military. The troops accepted his story and believed for many years that the generals were leading them to defeat.

His delusional nature does not mean that Mengistu was incapable of deliberate lies in order to deceive people. Take his version of the assassination of the sixty dignitaries in the interview with Genet. According to him, he was categorically opposed to such an extreme measure and vainly tried to convince other members of the Derg that whatever punishment they deserved must come from the due process of a court trial.⁵⁴ His attempt failed so that, in the end, as chairman of the Derg, he was given no other choice than to implement the decision of the majority.⁵⁵ Needless to say, in light of the numerous arbitrary killings associated with his name, his description of himself as a defender of due process is not likely to convince anybody. In the same interview, Mengistu comes close to denying responsibility for the horrors of the Red Terror. When Genet told him that the government response to the terror of the EPRP was extremely disproportionate, he retorted that angry people over whom the government had no control committed the horrific acts. In a revolutionary situation defined by the explosion of popular anger, there was nothing that Mengistu or his government could do to stop people from engaging in atrocities.⁵⁶

Another instance of a blatant lie is Mengistu's version of how he ended up in Zimbabwe. To be sure, for people to think that he fled to Zimbabwe was for him a source of pain, since it shattered the image of a determined nationalist that he had profusely projected for years in order to appease his low esteem. The pain is such that, even if Ethiopians have undeniable testimonies and facts confirming that he indeed fled the country, he had to come up with a concocted story, namely, that he was victim of a coup supported by the American government. According to his version, his original intention was to visit university students who were in a military training camp in Blatten. However, he took the opportunity to secretly go to Kenya and discuss with the Kenyan government about the delivery of weapons bought from China, given that the port of Assab had fallen in the hands of the EPLF. Unfortunately, once in Kenya, the situation took a totally different turn: not only did he hear that the Ethiopian government had announced his resignation and departure, but he also realized that the Kenyan government was directly instructed by the American government not to cooperate with him in any way. Unable to return to Addis Ababa, he then decided to go to Zimbabwe.⁵⁷ Mengistu fabricated his unbelievable story even though many facts show that he had planned his possible escape to Zimbabwe for quite some time. Thus, he recalled his uncle from Moscow a year before and nominat-

ed him ambassador to Zimbabwe while his wife made several trips to Zimbabwe at the same time. Likewise, the Ethiopian television showed Mengistu receiving a special message from Robert Mugabe on the eve of his escape.

The Dark Side of Narcissism

What is said so far validates the view that times of deep social crisis and uncertainty favor the rise to power of narcissistic leaders. However, were we to confine the inquiry to this conclusion, we would be but reducing the role of individuals to that of reflecting social needs. Chapter 4 had already underlined the need to go beyond the idea of leadership merely expressing social demands. It argued that the role of individuals can reach the level of independent variable impacting on the course of history and that one compelling way of proving the impact is to show a divergence between social demands and expectations and the course imparted by the leadership. The concept of narcissism is particularly apt to explain the divergence because it includes the understanding that the narcissistic leader reflects social demands to the extent that they can be used for self-glorification. Because "their leadership is driven by their own personal egotistical needs for power and admiration rather than by an empathetic concern for the constituents they lead," an inevitable bifurcation develops between the demands of society and the pursuit of self-glory and admiration. Consequently, narcissistic leaders will increasingly have recourse to dictatorial methods and unrealistic projects that defeat the social will and even antagonize their own followers.⁵⁸

In the case of Ethiopia, the bifurcation sprang from the fact that Mengistu, who drew his major strength from his narcissistic personality, became unable to sustain his leadership ability once he had consolidated his power. In effect, all the "qualities" by which he had impacted on followers and the society at large progressively turned into hindrances. As Dawit puts it, "his personality gradually began to change. His ability to listen and his patience faded away. We could now see these qualities were pretences only; he had been putting on his best behavior in his bid for support."⁵⁹ With the consolidation of his power, the advantages of his narcissistic traits vanished and progressively brought about his defeat. Thus, he became extremely irritable, especially when people came up with suggestions different from what he wanted to hear. This irritability clouded his judgment and made him unable to appreciate the value of alternative suggestions. In thus dismissing competent advisors, he was left with incompetent yes-men in the end.

Notably, with the rise to absolute power, there grew Mengistu's inability to control his emotions. For instance, his tendency to blame other people blocked his ability to listen by painting different opinions as treacherous stands. Such was the case with his generals: instead of listening to their complaints concerning the conduct of the war against the TPLF and the EPLF, he killed, imprisoned, or dismissed most of them at the slightest sign of divergence. A recently published book mentions the staggering number of forty-seven generals killed

by Mengistu during the seventeen years of his rule. The number does not include those who committed suicide or were killed in the fight against insurgents.⁶⁰ It is no exaggeration to say that the number perfectly corroborates the thesis that Mengistu has contributed more than anybody else to the defeat of the Ethiopian army.

Instead of decreasing the lack of trust in people surrounding him, the rise to absolute power did no more than exacerbate Mengistu's paranoia. The latter developed into an obsessive desire to control everything to the extent that nothing happened in the military as well in the civilian society without his knowledge and approval. In thus establishing a tight control that ruled out local initiatives, he created a rigid system of government that easily clogged at various levels. The consequences were particularly fatal for the efficient conduct of the war in Eritrea and Tigray. The fact that one brigade could not move without his personal consent exposed the huge army to successive defeats and demoralization for the simple reason that, having reduced power to his person, commanders at all levels were devoid of authority and initiative.⁶¹ Hence, although narcissism was the deep affective drive that explains his leadership qualities and determination to rise to power, it was also the cause of his downfall inasmuch as his obsessive control crippled his political leadership once he had reached his goal.

Before fully elaborating what scholars term the "self-defeating" tendency of narcissistic leaders with an eye of showing how the tendency does account for the defeat of the Ethiopian army and the subsequent overthrow of Mengistu, we have to analyze the armed oppositions that developed in Eritrean and Tigray. These armed struggles exhibit a remarkable continuity with the Revolution. The Eritrean insurgency was one of the causes of the Revolution and owed its rapid expansion to the doings and undoings of the revolutionary process. As to the armed struggle in Tigray, both its birth and expansion are inextricably interwoven with the Revolution. The purpose of the next chapter is to unravel the continuity of these armed struggles with the Revolution and thus consolidate the main thesis of the book, namely, the centrality of elite conflicts.

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Ethnonationalism and Political Competition

What was common to insurgencies in Eritrea, Tigray, and other regions of Ethiopia was their ethnonationalist banner. I use the term "ethnonationalism" to characterize political movements that claim to represent conquered and dominated nations defined in terms of inherited ethnic characteristics, such as common racial, tribal, cultural, or linguistic features. Since they speak in the name of dominated nations, the right to self-determination, including independence, is their avowed goal. They differ from mere ethnic movements, which are political movements that fight for equal rights and treatment, but fall short of being separatist. As such, ethnonationalism must be seen as a radicalizing ideology, that is, as an expression of political competition targeting the exclusion of rival elites through the formation of a new and independent state. Nowhere was this better illustrated than by the multiplication of ethnonationalist movements in Ethiopia following the overthrow of the monarchical rule.

Ethnicity as the Major Cause of the Ethiopian Revolution

Given the victory of the Derg, the civilian opposition needed a substitute ideology to Marxism-Leninism. The complete eradication of rightwing and leftwing forces, together with the Derg's centralizing and repressive policy, increasingly favored the ethnicization of protests. In search of an ideology that would sharply differentiate them from the Derg, many leftist groups found a rallying cause in ethnonationalism. The story of the Ethiopian leftist movement is well summarized if we say along with John W. Harbeson that it split into three "competing, yet overlapping, revolutionary movements," namely, "(1) *military-led socialism* . . . (2) *civilian socialism* . . . (3) *separatist nationalism*."¹

Ethnonationalist movements in Ethiopia prove even more extreme than Marxist radicalization, since most of the time they call for nothing less than the disintegration of Ethiopia. Even when such movements advocate sweeping decentralization and local autonomy, they know that they cannot push their cause without encouraging the proliferation of other ethnic movements, including among the Oromo. As the largest ethnic group, the ethnicization of the latter raises the possibility of the extinction of the Ethiopian state. Moreover, in light of the revolutionary measures, it was not easy to incite ordinary people and peasants to rebel against the Derg. Only through further radicalization, that is, through exasperation of social conflicts and the promise of doing more and better than the Derg could disgruntled elites hope to mobilize their ethnic groups and fuel broad conflicts. In particular, Ethiopianism and the Amhara ethnic group were stigmatized while local ethnic identity was idealized for the purpose of finding the alternative ideology that would promote regional elites at the expense of both military socialism and Ethiopian nationalist forces. Unsurprisingly, one way of promoting ethnicity was to make it the main cause for the eruption of the Ethiopian Revolution. Let us examine the validity of the assertion.

Many scholars, especially those belonging to Oromo, Tigrean, and Eritrean ethnic groups, defend the thesis that Amhara domination over other ethnic groups was the main cause of the Ethiopian Revolution. The thesis admits the existence of other causes if only because Amhara peasants and workers were also quite dissatisfied with the imperial regime, but it also maintains that the occurrence of a revolutionary outcome is not intelligible without the recognition of the primacy of the ethnic question over all other factors. For ethnonationalist intellectuals, among the various cracks in the imperial regime, "the discontent of the colonized peoples . . . was the deepest fault line running through the society."² In other words, the primary challenge that directed the social uprising toward a revolutionary denouement was the proliferation of ethnic and separatist movements, the most important being the armed insurrections in Eritrea.

The term "colonized peoples" is deliberately coined to underscore the seriousness of the ethnic issue in Ethiopia. According to many ethnonationalist-inspired studies, Ethiopia is not composed of various ethnic groups with one group having political supremacy, as is frequently the case in other African countries. The truth about Ethiopia is that it is a colonial state in that the Amhara elite under the leadership of Emperor Menilik violently conquered neighboring peoples and imposed its economic interests and culture on them. Just as in the case of European colonial conquest, in Ethiopia too, "boundaries [were] penetrated by outsiders who are products and carriers of a different system intent upon forcefully changing the pattern of production and imposing a different set of rules."³ The imposition of the Ethiopian rule with its imperial political system, feudal class relations, and Christian beliefs on the southern peoples, who had different social systems and beliefs, is no less colonial than the British or French conquest of African peoples. Speaking of the southern expansion of Ethiopia under Menilik, Addis Hiwet writes, "the same historical forces that

created the 'Gold Coast,' the 'Ivory Coast,' the Sudan and Kenya, were the very ones that created modern Ethiopia too."⁴

It follows that anything less than a thorough decolonization, which ultimately means the dismantling of Ethiopia, can satisfy the revolt of the "colonized" peoples. That is why, in an attempt to avoid the fragmentation of Ethiopia, first the Ethiopian student movement and then the military regime adopted the socialist ideology. The radicalization of the Ethiopian Revolution was thus the direct outcome of the colonial nature of the imperial regime. The revolutionary measures, such as the nationalization of land, were desperate attempts to keep the crumbling empire intact by appeasing the "colonized" peoples with gains that looked extensive.

According to ethnonationalist views, many facts related to the 1974 uprising confirm the primacy of the ethnic issue. Since the major phenomenon that led to the collapse of the imperial regime was revolts in the barracks, they underline the impact of armed insurrections in Eritrea, Ogaden, and elsewhere. The military rebelled because the need to constantly fight separatist movements made life very hazardous to them. Without the perilous and wretched conditions of life deriving from the need to combat unceasing guerrilla wars, the military would not have rebelled against Haile Selassie and his regime. Recall that the demand for better conditions of life of a garrison stationed in the remote town of Negele triggered the protest in the armed forces, which protest was immediately echoed by units stationed in Eritrea.

In the eyes of ethnonationalist scholars, one cannot underestimate the impact of the intensifying armed resistance in Eritrea. At first limited to the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front), which was Muslim-dominated, "the basis of the movement widened to include Christians as Eritrea's population became increasingly dissatisfied with the imperial administration of the province."⁵ Moreover, in 1970, a split within the ELF led to the creation of a Marxist political group, namely, the EPLF, which offered a tougher and more organized armed resistance.

Even though the resistance in Ogaden was more subdued, it remained a recurring challenge owing to the extensive support that dissident groups received from the Somali government. As to Oromo resistance, a significant manifestation occurred when "in 1963, a rebellion took place in Bale province over the payment of taxes, which the government sent the regular army to crush."⁶ One of its consequences was the creation the same year of the Mecha-Tulema Self-help Association, which "gradually began to articulate the dissatisfaction of the Oromo with government policies."⁷ The organization, which claimed as many as 300,000 members, became so significant a threat that in 1967 Haile Selassie banned it and imprisoned its leaders.

Not only did these ethnic and regional revolts weaken the imperial regime, but they also drove, as stated earlier, the Ethiopian process of social change into the path of a radical revolution. The student movement adopted socialism as the best solution to what was then called "the nationality question." An ethnic hegemony as embedded and extensive as the Amhara rule required nothing less

than a complete reorganization of the social order and of its ideological apparatus. At any rate, the principles of liberal democracy, so maintain ethnonationalists, were not equipped to deal with discontents of such magnitude. Thus, the monarchical system based on the myth of the Solomonic dynasty could not integrate and represent the non-Semitic and non-Christian peoples of southern Ethiopia. A secular and inclusive ideology was necessary to integrate the various southern ethnic groups. Even more necessary was the implementation of a change modifying the very nature of the society's class structure. Only through the public ownership of the means of production could ethnic domination be done away with. The liberal approach, ethnonationalists argue, can dissolve feudalism, but not the ethnic domination, for so long as the class structure is not dismantled, the dominance of the Amhara ruling elite would be preserved. The removal of the ruling class, and that alone, could liberate the dominated ethnics.

It is because the liberation and integration of ethnic groups seemed to require more than the liberalization of the system that Ethiopian students and intellectuals came to see the Soviet Union as the model to follow. The belief that unity can be realized only through the dissolution of the class society, and not through the liberalization of the imperial system, is certainly one major explanation for the drift toward socialism. As a union based on the free federation of various ethnic groups, the Soviet Union appeared as a shining example of success in nation-building: it "offered a narrative of how to weld together (or so it seemed in 1976) disparate ethnic groups into a unitary state defined by the boundaries of a previous conquest—by Russians in the Soviet Union and by Amhara and Tigreans in Ethiopia."⁸ As a result, the Ethiopian student movement adopted "the formula, disunite to unite," which supported the right to self-determination of conquered ethnic groups, the expectation being that the recognition of the right will pave the way for a voluntary union.⁹ The Soviet model also inspired the Derg, even if its version of socialism rejected the idea of union based on freely federated ethnic groups.

According to ethnonationalist scholars, another source of inspiration to Ethiopian students came from the ideological evolution of the Eritrean insurgency. So long as the insurgency was reflecting religious separatism, Ethiopian students and intellectuals were reluctant to support it. But as soon as the EPLF emerged with its Marxist-Leninist ideology and showed signs of success, not only were Ethiopian students and intellectuals inclined to support it, but they were also galvanized and further radicalized. The adoption of a Marxist language by Eritrean insurgency convinced many Ethiopians that the espousal of socialism was the best way to safeguard Ethiopian unity. Since Marxists know that unity rather than fragmentation promotes the interest of the working masses, in the words of a famous Ethiopian student, Walleligne Mekonen, "a socialist movement will never remain secessionist for good."¹⁰ Moreover, many Ethiopians viewed the apparent inability of the imperial army to crush the EPLF as a proof that Marxism-Leninism was also the right ideology to overthrow the monarchical regime.

Against the Ethnonationalist Thesis

A number of decisive arguments can be made against the thesis that ethnic issues were the main cause of the Ethiopian Revolution. Let it be clear, however, that I contest the characterization of the ethnic question as the primary cause of the Revolution, but not that it was one of its causes. Nor do I deny that it became the major issue in post imperial Ethiopia. To be sure, the exasperation of elite conflicts under the Derg's monopoly of power largely accounts for the proliferation of ethnonationalist ideology and groups.

First of all, even though separatist movements erupted here and there during Haile Selassie's rule, none was really strong enough—including the Eritrean insurgency—to score meaningful military victories, even less to threaten the imperial regime. As Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate note:

The emperor failed to resolve the Eritrean and Ogaden separatist movements but managed to control both. None of these movements threatened the emperor's grip over his government. In fact, the emperor had the support of the majority of the Ethiopians in defending the national unity of the country.¹¹

Because separatist movements were largely contained militarily and limited to remote and peripheral areas, their characterization as the main cause of the downfall of the regime is an obvious exaggeration. Rather than reflecting real facts, the characterization reveals a retrospective reading wrongly projecting post-revolutionary developments as antecedent causes.

As reiterated in previous chapters, deep dissatisfaction of urban populations over conditions of life, especially in Addis Ababa—dissatisfaction intensified by soaring inflation resulting from the OPEC's decision to quadruple the price of oil—explains the uprising against Haile Selassie. This material dissatisfaction did not affect particular ethnic groups only; it also angered the Amhara people so that the social uprising exhibited a class character rather than ethnic alignments. Moreover, the absence of peasant revolts indicates that the ethnic issue was not the driving force of the social uprising. As we saw, one defining character of the Ethiopian Revolution was that the rural population was generally quiet during the urban demonstrations as well as the events leading to the overthrow of the monarchy. It would not have been so had the ethnic issue been at the forefront of the revolutionary movement.

I know the counter-objections of ethnonationalist scholars: they say that the urban dissatisfaction grew to the point of explosion because of the persistence of separatist movements. Firstly, urban movements became threatening because of the massive involvement of Eritrean, Tigrean, and Oromo protesters who were echoing ethnic concerns. Secondly, the need to maintain a powerful military force drained resources and aggravated the dissatisfaction among urban populations as well as in the armed forces. Because of the proliferation of regional armed uprisings, the Ethiopian economy had reached the point of being unable to finance the growing need of a large military force, especially after the U.S.

government reduced its financial assistance following the abandonment of its military base near Asmara in the early 1970s.

Even if we grant that the need to maintain a large repressive force had caused, directly or indirectly, the urban dissatisfaction, the point remains that the dissatisfaction did not result in ethnonationalist alignments. If it had taken an ethnonationalist dimension, the Ethiopian Revolution would not have occurred. It is the subdued nature of ethnic conflicts in favor of unity against the imperial regime and the landed aristocracy that unified the revolutionary forces and made the Marxist theory of class struggle relevant to them. Notably, without the large and active participation of Amhara, who were dominant in all spheres of social life, the Revolution could not have taken place. The beginning of the Revolution unquestionably manifested the prevalence of class consciousness and solidarity over ethnic exclusivisms. As Marina and David Ottaway write: during the early stages of the Revolution "class conflicts cut across the country's main ethnic divisions."¹²

The characterization of the ethnic issue as the main cause of the Ethiopian Revolution reveals a misreading of its driving force, especially of its nature as a revolution from above. As already stated, what turned the initial protest into a radical revolution was not so much the obligation to deal with existing problems as the need to create objective conditions conducive to the rule of a military junta. Had the main objective been the resolution of real problems rather than the empowerment of an eccentric group of military men, less polarizing and economically more propitious measures would have been implemented. To the extent that the Derg's monopoly of power and the subsequent aggravation of material destitution have sharpened discontents, especially as concerns the educated elite, they have directly encouraged the ethnicization of protests. Far from ethnic protests being the main cause of the Revolution, they express disappointment over its outcomes. Even as regards Eritrea, separatism would not have gained wide support without the Derg's numerous failings.

The ethnonationalist thesis deliberately confuses national aspiration with the protest against domination and aspiration for equal rights. That dominated ethnic groups, like the Tigreans, the Oromo, and other southern peoples, demanded equal treatment is quite undeniable. But the demand for equal treatment is not yet an ethnonationalist position; it is even the opposite in that it longs for integration in lieu of separatism. What was most prevalent in the early days of the Revolution was the issue of integration, not of separate identity, still less of self-determination. If we take the case of the Oromo people, national aspiration, that is, the project of creating a new and independent national state has emerged for the first time when a bunch of radicals created the OLF in 1973. The fact that "serious Oromo militancy did not emerge . . . until the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was founded in 1973" clearly indicates that ethnonationalism was too negligible to have a critical impact on the revolutionary events of 1974.¹³ As to the case of Tigray, the TPLF did not even exist when the urban uprisings started, since it was founded by a group of Tigrean extremist students in 1975.

The prevailing perception in the Ethiopian student movement provides proof that ethnonationalism was a byproduct of Ethiopia's revolutionary developments. The consensus is that the movement was the first to push the ethnic question to the forefront. The statement is true provided that it adds that for the majority of students the issue of ethnic inequality was reducible to class domination. For instance, most students viewed the dominance of tenancy in the south of the country less as a colonial treatment of southern peoples than as a dilation of the traditional feudalism, which was also the plight of Amhara and Tigrean peasants. Without the belief in the primacy of class solidarity over ethnicity, the student movement would have been fragmented into ethnic lines with the majority, represented by Amhara students, siding against ethnonationalism.

These facts clearly establish that ethnicization is essentially a post-revolutionary development. This is not to say that ethnic protests, even separatist movements did not exist before the Revolution; they did, but they were small movements and did not constitute a real threat. The implementation of socialist policy created conditions favorable to the growth of ethnic consciousness, which increasingly developed into ethnonationalism through the intensification of armed resistances.

Elite Interest and Mobilization

A convenient way to bring out the connection between elite conflicts and ethnonationalism as a radical ideology is to review the theoretical debates on the nature of ethnicity. The extensive literature on ethnic conflicts unravels three antagonistic schools. The first is the position of scholars who define ethnic identity as a primary attachment, that is, as having its roots in psycho-biological drives conditioning people to be part of affective and solidaristic closed groups. For them, ethnicity is a primordial phenomenon based on emotional connection to objective and fixed social characteristics, such as blood ties, race, language, religion, and custom. In the words of an important exponent of primordialism, Pierre L. van den Berghe, "ethnicity . . . is extended kinship."¹⁴ One major consequence follows: the right to self-determination up to secession becomes a supreme right since there is no pleasing such a primary attachment except through the granting of political sovereignty every time it aspires for a separate existence.

For the second position known as instrumentalism, ethnic conflict is less about attachment to primary identity and more about competition for the control of state power. Ethnicity is how elites vying for state power mobilize people in the name of distinct characteristics. To quote Harvey Glickman, ethnicity is used as "a focal point for mobilization or competition over resources, be they within or outside the state apparatus, economic or political."¹⁵ Since ethnicity is primarily about politics rather than about cultural attachment, a political arrangement allowing decentralization and power-sharing can promote a peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Both the depiction of ethnicity as a vehicle of political struggle and the subsequent proposal making greater democratization into a remedy for ethnic conflicts present instrumentalism as a rational approach. Unfortunately, it comes up against a major objection, to wit, it views ethnicity as a product of elite manipulation. Such an understanding is unable to account for the emotional dimension and often violent expressions of ethnic conflicts. It is difficult to see why the masses follow with great fervor the discourse of elites unless it awakens their own deep affective longings. Moreover, the neglect of the affective dimension overlooks that the need to protect their language and culture is the reason why ethnic groups want to have their own state. Material interests cannot explain ethnic conflicts in light of ethnic groups often exhibiting a readiness to sacrifice such interests for the sake of protecting identity.

Does this mean that primordialism is right after all? Not so if we underline that, rather than reviving already existing primary attachments, ethnic discourses actually invent new identities. This is the line that the constructivist school pursues: it argues that mistreatments and the need of liberation drive marginalized elites to imagine communities embellished with thrilling characteristics, thereby successfully mobilizing the people with whom they identify. The promise of deliverance activates affective components that impart an emotional dimension to what is but an invented identity. The school thus "sees ethnicity as the product of human agency, a creative social act through which such commonalities as speech code, cultural practice, ecological adaptation, and political organization become woven into a consciousness of shared identity."¹⁶ Far from being primordial, ethnicity is, therefore, historical and, as such, complex, fluid, and changing.

The constructivist correction of instrumentalism does not fully answer the question of why the invented discourse of elites moves the masses to the point of violent confrontations. True, the element of imagination is liable to arouse emotional forces, but there is also no denying that the ethnic discourse works with past materials associated with common descent and cultural legacy to which people are naturally attached. The involvement of past materials precisely downplays fluidity in favor of ascriptive rights intent on excluding other groups. For the generation of a closed group to become the object of emotional attachment, the sole involvement of human imaginative capacity is not enough; the group must primarily be crafted with sentiments of relatedness inherent in human nature. Moreover, the idea that constructivism constitutes a distinct school is questionable if only because it loses much of its explanatory force without a great dose of instrumentalism.

Instead of setting instrumentalism against constructivism, the best approach is to fuse them so as to recover what is valid in primordialism. In effect, is not the mobilization of affective and cultural forces the most effective way of promoting interests, especially when said interests are challenged or denied? Accordingly, ethnic mobilizations are better understood if cultural construction is itself an instrument whose purpose is to optimize a political claim. In other

words, ethnic groups are "calculating, self-interested collective actors, maximizing material values through the vehicle of communal identity."¹⁷ The proposal sees the emotional component as a product of a construction for a political purpose rather than a spontaneous reaction of primordial attachments.

Such an approach recovers the strong argument of primordialism in that it retains the powerful role of culture without, however, losing sight of the material component of ethnicity. While it admits that the emotional force of ethnicity cannot be explained without appealing to primordial impulses, it maintains that the impulses do not provide the inspiration; rather, they are used to maximize definite interests. They do so because powerful sentiments associated with identity and group solidarity provide "an exclusionary principle permitting limitation of benefits to group members."¹⁸ The principle puts at the disposal of elites fighting for the control of power the strategy of mobilizing ascriptive characteristics (common descent, language, culture, etc.) so as to exclude rival elites as aliens. The use of ethnic criteria thus maps out constituencies that function as a reserve power base for vying elites.

The fusion of interest with affectivity works for elites vying for the control of power because it endows ethnicity with a mobilizing power. When elite interests are crafted in such a way as to arouse natural sentiments associated with identity and group solidarity, they reach out to the masses. True, elites can mobilize people by appealing to their imagination, to their ability to dream about a just and happy society. But the ability to awaken dormant utopian longings becomes even more powerful when it mobilizes natural sentiments pertaining to identity and group solidarity. The happy and just society becomes credible if it blends with and enlivens

the belief on the part of its members that there exists a natural emotional bond between the individual and the community, and that ethnic consciousness is indeed a central component of individual identity. The ethnic community thus constitutes an ethical community, whose members see themselves as having prior moral obligations to each other, over and above any obligations they owe to other communities.¹⁹

Solidarity sentiments become even more mobilizing when ruling elites are made responsible for the economic plights of the ethnic community. What is common in ethnic discourses is the framing of culprits with the consequence that it unleashes resentment. Elites' revival of traditional identities, in addition to portraying such elites as saviors, frames social relations in terms of culprits and victims. Just as the Marxist concept of class exploitation politicized poverty, so too the ethnic discourse politicizes identities by portraying the possession of some inherent characteristics (language, descent, religious beliefs, etc.) as reasons for mistreatment. In so doing, it stirs up anger that it directs against the group holding power, which, of course, it also defines in ethnic terms. Since the vilification of ruling elites results in the them/us dichotomy with high normative overtones, it turns the confrontation between ethnic groups into a struggle be-

tween the good and the bad, the virtuous and the vicious. This moral classification is then used to justify the resort to violent means.

Another reinforcing factor is the restorative function of ethnic discourse. Discriminatory treatment as a result of the hegemony of one ethnic group has a deep impact on the self-representation of dominated or marginalized groups. One way of understanding the effect is to contrast class mobilization with ethnic mobilization. Class disparities within a community sharing common characteristics do not invite interpretations in terms of discrimination. Consequently, those who find themselves in lower positions conserve their dignity by thinking that they are of the same stuff as those who rule them. The situation is different with social relations involving people of dissimilar ethnic attributes. Poverty and political domination are easily interpreted as expressions of discriminatory treatment, and so activate feelings associated with humiliation. Not only does the ethnic construction inflame the pain of humiliation, but it also proposes a curative solution in the form of self-determination or self-rule. While the solution supports the political ambition of ethnicized elite groups, it is also largely accepted as a necessary step toward the removal of humiliation. According to the logic of ethnicization, pride is restored only when governments by non-kindred people, however democratic they may claim to be, are replaced by governments of kindred-people.

The use of ascriptive criteria differentiating groups and individuals has so maximizing a value that it often generates intractable conflicts. Because the material interest of contending elites "taps cultural and symbolic issues—basic notions of identity and the self, of individual and group worth and entitlement—the conflicts it generates are intrinsically less amenable to compromise than those revolving around material issues."²⁰ One example is the often unsolvable contention of ethnic groups over the choice of a national language, which is associated with issues of prestige, access to education and its rewards, and ultimately with the control of power. On the other hand, the crafting of interests in terms of self-representation implicating pride and primary identification conveniently "links elite and mass concerns and answers the insistent question of why the followers follow."²¹

An important question remains: why do material interests acquire an exclusionary form? The answer lies in the modernization process of societies that came to develop centralized state power in conjunction with stagnant economic performances. As reiterated by theories of underdevelopment, the introduction of capitalism in societies under colonial domination or lacking the necessary prerequisites has resulted in a sluggish, internally unequal, and externally dependent form of development. Given the deficit in economic expansion, the growth of urbanization and the subsequent increase of social needs could not but turn scarce resources into objects of intense competition among elites.

To preserve their hegemonic position, the ruling elites that inherited the colonial state devised nation-building strategies that justified and favored the emergence of a centralized power system. The latter was accordingly used to

marginalize rising elites, thereby producing a social situation in which access to state power became a *sine qua non* for the control of scarce resources. Marginalized elites reacted to this situation of exclusion by politicizing group characteristics both as a way of countering the politics of "homogeneity through assimilation and the suppression of distinct identities" advocated by the nation-building ideology and mobilizing definite constituencies for the conquest of state power.²² In other words, "ethnic conflict is a by-product of modernization itself"; it is how "educated, urban elites 'organize collective support to advance their position in the competition for the benefits of modernity.'"²³

What needs to be specified is the condition under which ethnicity assumes the radicalized form of ethnonationalism. So long as ethnic criteria are used to demand equal treatments of rights, ethnicity is perfectly compatible with a nation-building goal as well as with the promotion of liberal democracy and individual rights. However, when the usage is such that it excludes other groups and targets self-rule or secession, it evolves into ethnonationalism. The question of knowing what causes the evolution is easily answered when we note that "elites stand to gain from the creation of new opportunities in a smaller, albeit poorer, state. . . . Secession creates new positions, while reducing the pool of competitors."²⁴ Evidently, a situation of increased scarcity protected by a tightly centralized state power favoring a given elite is bound to encourage secessionist options. When state power privileges one group at the expense of others, competing elites invoke the right to self-determination by inventing nations defined ascriptively. Both the intensity and intractability of existing conflicts favor ethnonationalist positions rather than the integrative goal of a civic type of nationalism.

In sum, when conflicts between ruling and marginalized elites exasperate, they assume the form of competing nationalisms, the consequence of which is that the existence of the central state comes into question. Depending on circumstances, the belligerent groups can even develop hegemonic aspirations that offer no other solution than war and balkanization. To quote Gebru Tareke:

The tensions and conflicts that rival nationalisms and counterhegemonic movements generate are accentuated by scarce and diminishing resources in the face of exploding populations and rising social demands. Second, following independence, the state became both the source and site of conflict because, in the absence of a dominant class with a grip on the economy, the state acts as the chief custodian and allocator of national resources. This often spurred violent competition for political power, since differential access to the state meant unequal access to wealth and privilege.²⁵

Ethiopia offers a perfect illustration of how diminishing resources monopolized by state centralization translated into exasperated forms of elite conflict first as class-revolutionism, second as ethnonationalism.

The Roots of Ethiopia's Ethnonational Conflicts

According to Merera Gudina, a long-time student of Ethiopian politics and leader of the Oromo People's Congress, elite conflicts are the central issue of modern Ethiopia and the main source of its predicaments. Moving away from primordialist concepts, he presents an instrumentalist perspective of elites struggling for hegemony. He does not underrate ethnic oppression, but he maintains that the real difficulty originates not so much from oppression as from the germination during the struggle against oppression of an exclusive or hegemonic form of power struggle obstructing democratic solutions. Because the issue of ethnic oppression has been hijacked by the pursuit of hegemony, Merera attributes the central cause of the current crisis of the Ethiopian state to "the multiple competing interests and contradictory visions of the contending elites who are the moving spirit of ethnic nationalism."²⁶ These contending visions are represented by the hegemonic aspiration of the Tigrean elite, the nostalgists of the Amhara domination, and the secessionist aspiration of the Oromo elite.

Merera shows that these contending visions are grounded in contradictory accounts of Ethiopia's history following Emperor Menilik's southern expansion. There is the "nation-building perspective": defended by the Amhara elite and others, it considers centralization and cultural homogenization as necessary means to achieve national integration and development.²⁷ Derived from the Marxist orientation of the Ethiopian student movement and represented by such organizations as the EPRP and the MEISON is the "national oppression perspective": its advocates "recognize the injustices done during the process of expansion but seek a solution within greater Ethiopia."²⁸ The third is "the colonization perceptive" of Eritrean liberation movements, the OLF, and other groups; it equates the Ethiopian expansion with colonization and subsequently fights for secession.²⁹

In light of these hegemonic movements, the inability to reach consensus among vying elites on the nature of a representative government and its democratic rules stands out as the main cause of the present crisis of Ethiopia. The way out of the crisis is "the abandoning of hegemonic aspirations and zero-sum politics by the ruling elite and of extravagant claims to the right of secession by certain other elites."³⁰ Clearly, so long as hegemonic aspirations persist, the dominant tendency is to exclude competing elites or to secede altogether rather than to reach a consensus on power sharing by devising democratic means.

As developed in Chapters 5 and 6, at the root of the contradictory interpretations of history by which each vying group reflects the objective conditions favoring its hegemonic aspiration, we find Haile Selassie's centralized state as created for the purpose of safeguarding the exclusive interests of a landed class operating in an economic system afflicted by underdevelopment. The resulting scarcity of resources led rising elites to think in terms of exclusion of the landed aristocracy and nascent bourgeois elements, which they articulated first through the Marxist ideology of class struggle. With the victory of the Derg over the

civilian left and the implementation of a policy of across-the-board nationalization, conflicts over scarce resources became intensified. Together with the spread of corruption and nepotism, the Derg's inability to bring about economic progress resulted in a chronic shortage of even basic goods. As John Markakis remarks, the conflicts "reached exaggerated proportions in the Horn of Africa under the radical military regimes that ruled Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, in the 1970s and 1980s, when all resources came under state ownership and control."³¹ Both the nationalization of resources and the subsequent economic decline turned access to state power into the sole avenue for economic opportunities.

Such a restricted access to scarce resources could not but exacerbate the competition for state power, thereby intensifying ethnic alignments and mobilizations. Indeed, as the instrumentalist perspective explains, "exclusion from power and relative resource deprivation serves to heighten the cultural identity and solidarity of subordinate groups."³² Both the omnipotence of the Ethiopian state and its exclusive usage by a closed military group discouraged attempts to reform or democratize the political system. Instead, they promoted a strategy of violent conquest of political power, alone able to empower a rival elite at the expense of the military group and other competing elites. In this way, the Ethiopian situation turned into a conflict between hegemonic forces, and so favored the politicization of ethnic features and ethnonationalist positions both as a way of creating exclusive power bases and maximizing the political objectives of competing elites.

The genesis of ethnonationalism in Ethiopia and its spread in connection with the socialist experience are best illustrated by the split that divided the student movement. In particular, the conflict between the EPRP and the TPLF boiled down to a rival regional elite contesting the rise of a multinational elite. Both movements claimed to be Marxist-Leninist, and both were committed to the principle of self-determination of ethnic groups. Why, then, were they not able to unite, even despite the fact that many radical Tigreans were in the leadership position of the EPRP? The answer is obvious: insofar as the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the EPRP asserted the primacy of unity stemming from the class interest of the working masses, it was not conducive to the empowerment of a regional elite. Whereas "the EPRP consistently argued that the primary contradiction in Ethiopia was manifested in class struggle, and that national struggle (hence, question of nationalities) was secondary," the TPLF maintained that the national question was the principal contradiction so that oppressed nationalities must first organize independently and fight for self-determination before they unite voluntarily with other national groups.³³ Consequently, the EPRP portrayed the TPLF "as a narrow nationalist" movement, while the TPLF called the EPRP "a chauvinist Amhara organization."³⁴ In arguing that the resolution of the national contradiction is a prerequisite to class emancipation so that each oppressed nationality should first fight for its own national liberation, the TPLF was simply reserving Tigray as its exclusive constituency. It was establishing an

ascriptive right to speak in the name of Tigrean people to the exclusion of all other competing elites.

What definitively confirms that ethnonationalism is about elite rivalry is that northern Ethiopia has become more ethnicized than the south. To quote Christopher Clapham, "paradoxically, the issue of 'nationalities' has been much less immediate and intense in southern Ethiopia than in the north."³⁵ It is definitely a paradox, given that the north is culturally and ethnically closer to the Amhara elite than the south. Because of the recentness of the southern conquest, the south is culturally and ethnically much more diverse as well as different from the north. Yet well-entrenched ethnic guerrilla movements developed in Eritrea and Tigray, as opposed to the south's much more subdued movements, in direct defiance to the colonial theory of the southern expansion. The OLF has not yet succeeded in emerging as a viable and united force capable of opposing military resistance to the central state. Among the various reasons for the northern peculiarity, such as the colonial history of Eritrea, the extensive poverty of Tigray, and the geographical remoteness of the north from the center of power, the most compelling factor seems to be the old-age rivalry between Tigrean and Amhara elites. In the face of the continuous hegemony of the Amhara elite and the centralizing policy of the modern state, northern elites had to manufacture ethnonationalist identities: only by becoming the exclusive representatives of Tigrean and Eritrean peoples could they emerge as viable contenders.

With the political victory of the Derg, ideological differentiation for the purpose of creating a power base became even more imperative. As we saw, the only way to oppose the Derg and gather some popular support was the ethnic question, since the Derg had appropriated the socialist ideology. So long as leftist groups had the political and ideological initiative, the ethnic issue was attractive to limited groups only. But when in the name of socialism the Derg gave no other alternative than collaboration or elimination, the ethnonationalist motto became the only viable form of opposition. Its obvious advantage was the interpretation of economic inequality as a deliberate product of marginalization accomplished through centralization and the cultural hegemony of the Amhara elite. Where else could this interpretation lead but to the right to self-determination up to secession, a claim around which regional elites could unite and oppose resistance?

Unlike ethnic movements, pan-Ethiopian movements, such as the EPRP and the MEISON, found themselves in ideological disarray. Robbed of their political program, they became unable to differentiate themselves meaningfully from the Derg. The implementation of their program by the Derg took away their popular support and left them incapable of opposing effective and sustained resistance. As one author correctly notes, the Derg's revolutionary measures, especially the radical land reform, brought about nothing less than "the demise of the cause of the Ethiopian radicals."³⁶ Where dictatorship excludes political reform and where alignment on the basis of common class interests appears unfeasible, ethnicity stands out as the only alternative left. Better yet, it emerges as "an effec-

tive means of political mobilization for those who seek access to state power in order to change the existing pattern of resource distribution."³⁷ A cursory review of the rise of the TPLF provides a pertinent illustration of the effectiveness of ethnonationalism in the Ethiopian context.

The Case of the TPLF

Explaining the TPLF's choice of an ethnonationalist strategy, Aregawi Berhe, a founding member and commander for many years, writes: "the TPLF leadership put forward ethno-nationalism with 'self-determination including and up to secession' as its principal goal mainly because it offered the best chance of building an effective fighting force that leads to power, which understandably is the elite's own goal."³⁸ In specifying the elite's goal as power, Aregawi advances an instrumentalist conception of ethnic conflicts and confirms that the reason for the elites's choice of an ethnonationalist ideology is its great mobilizing power.

To speak of efficiency is to imply that ethnonationalism was indeed appealing to the masses of Tigray. Interestingly, however, Aregawi maintains that the people of Tigray were not enthusiastic about ethnonationalism. In his own words,

The self-determination agenda advanced to mobilize the masses of Tigray was *not* largely adhered to by the people; on the basis of their historical experiences and achievements they even strongly believed that they were not only just Ethiopians but that they constituted the core of Ethiopia's ancient civilization. The disparity between the self-determination agenda and the inherent pan-Ethiopian aspirations of the masses was high.³⁹

If the Tigrean masses were so loyal to the Ethiopian nation that they did not believe in the ethnonationalist ideology of the elite, then why did they follow the elite to the point of accepting huge sacrifices in a drawn-out fight against the superior army of the government? In other words, Aregawi faces the objection usually made against the instrumentalist theory: why do the masses rally behind elites even as ethnonationalism seems to be confined to elite interests?

At first, advancing the argument of manipulation, Aregawi suggests that people "can be easily manipulated by the elite in arbitrary and dubious ways" so that scholars are mistaken when they underestimate the power of deception.⁴⁰ Happily, Aregawi senses that manipulation is not enough; he expands his explanation by adding that "a combination of many old and contemporary factors, grounded on ethno-nationalist sentiments, drew the people of Tigray to rally behind the TPLF."⁴¹ He finds the organizing principle of the various factors in the historical consciousness of Tigray, more exactly, in the "widespread resentment in Tigray"⁴² against the Amhara elite. Tigray's historical consciousness reflects two incompatible visions: the evocation of Tigray's glorious past on the one hand, and, on the other, the decline of modern Tigray. The painful contradiction out of which a deep resentment grew is then that

Tigrai was the centre of power and influence in the evolution of the Ethiopian state. The subsequent shift of the centrality of power and influence away from the Tigraian to the Amhara elite more often through force and manipulation but also because of external interventions put Tigrains at a disadvantage.⁴³

What else could the frustration of being overthrown and marginalized by the Amhara elite unleash but a Tigrean aspiration to hegemony? All the more reason for triggering a struggle for hegemony is the minority status of Tigray, as compared to the larger Amhara constituency. To overcome numerical disadvantage, the Tigrean elite needed to achieve hegemony so as to fashion a political system in which group rights prevail over majority rule. Some such political goal required an ethnonationalist ideology, that is, the definition of Tigray as a nation within Ethiopia and, as such, possessing the right to self-determination either in the form of self-rule or, if need be, independence.

The presence of resentment as a uniting factor between the Tigrean elite and the masses facilitated the building of confidence. According to Aregawi,

The largely peasant society of Tigrai appeared to have 'accepted' the self-determination enterprise, partly because they came to believe in the promises of socio-economic transformation programmes and in the liberation from state oppression, and partly for fear of reprisal or coercion of the TPLF if the mobilization process would be opposed.⁴⁴

If we ask the question of why Tigrean peasants came to believe in the elite's promise of a better future, it is that resentment made credible the painting of the Amhara elite as the main culprit for the economic poverty of Tigray. The vilification of the Amhara elite presented conditions in Tigray as a deliberately induced state of poverty by a vicious elite intent on suppressing a rival power. The fact that the promise of a better future by the Tigrean elite fed on an existing grudge made the message plausible. It also simplified it since development amounted to removing a vicious rival.

The attribution of Tigray's paucity to a deliberate policy of marginalization became even more credible with the rise of the Derg. To be sure, in terms of economic outcomes, the radical reforms of the Derg, especially the extensive nationalization of economic life, were as damaging to Tigray and Eritrea as to the rest of the country. There was, however, one important exception: whereas the Derg's land reform benefited southern peasants by abolishing tenancy, it did nothing for Tigrean peasants, who were not tenants. The elimination of tenancy has certainly made southern peasants less sensitive to an ethnonationalist battle cry. By contrast, in addition to the lack of any improvement in the conditions of life, the northern part increasingly faced periodical famines as well as displacements, essentially caused by the ravages of an expanding war, the consequence of which was the worsening of conditions of life, both in Tigray and Eritrea. In this condition of increasing destitution and displacement, an ethnonationalist

battle cry had a better chance to be heard in the north, especially by the peasantry, than in the southern part of the country.

The other factor that facilitated the alignment of the masses with the elite was the brutality of the Derg regime, in particular its indiscriminate repression. The rapid military growth of the TPLF "can to a considerable extent be attributed to the indiscriminate and brutal repression of the *Dergue*-led Ethiopian army," says Aregawi.⁴⁵ Whereas a more conciliatory and less violent government would have made things more difficult for the TPLF, the Derg's brutality and uncompromising policy gave people no other choice than to support the guerrilla fighters. The tendency to support and even join the fight grew as government troops proved unable to defeat the insurgents. Not only does success attract, but it also cements unity around the leadership. Moreover, the inability of government troops convinced people that opposing the TPLF was not a wise option. Since the government cannot protect, even opponents of the TPLF preferred to support the organization rather than run the risk of displeasing it. In other words, the elite used persuasion as much as intimidation and repression to ensure a wide support for its ethnonationalist agenda.

No less supportive of the ethnonationalist ideology was the TPLF's need to frame the Eritrean insurgency in terms advantageous to its political goal. From the start, the hope of defeating the Ethiopian army hinged on the possibility of forging an alliance with the EPLF and obtaining its support. And no alliance appeared possible unless the TPLF upheld the secessionist agenda of the EPLF. The hitch, however, was that the breakup of Eritrea from Ethiopia was a bitter pill to swallow for the Tigrean people as it landlocked both Ethiopia and Tigray. Of all things, the Tigrean elite would have been unable to explain the Eritrean independence to the Tigrean people on the basis of a unitary ideology. So to let Eritrea go, the Tigrean elite had to deconstruct the concept of Ethiopia as a unitary nation and promote the ethnonationalist view of Ethiopia as composed of separate nations, each having the unquestionable right to secede:

More importantly, the Tigrean hegemonic aspiration could not succeed without the secession of Eritrea. What was clear as daylight to the Tigrean elite was the impossibility of achieving hegemonic rule so long as Eritrea was part of Ethiopia, given that the EPLF, which had already developed a hegemonic aspiration and forged the instrument to achieve its goal, would undoubtedly become a formidable rival. The only way by which the Tigrean elite could retain Eritrea was to cede power to the EPLF or fight an endless war that would finally destabilize its power. A tragic confirmation of the irreconcilable rivalry between the two elite groups was the outbreak of a destructive and extremely murderous war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998 over a border dispute. To the extent that the Tigrean elite knew that its hegemonic aspiration depended on the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia, it welcomed ethnonationalism as the ideology providing the justification and the legal norms to secure its goal.

While the Derg successfully defeated the various pan-Ethiopian oppositions and eastern guerrilla movements and the Somali invasion, it was unable to weaken the ethnonationalist insurgencies in Eritrean and Tigray, respectively led

by the EPLF and the TPLF, despite the mobilization of a huge and well-armed military force. After a prolonged guerrilla war, the alliance of the two movements successively scored decisive military victories that brought about the collapse of the Derg. The next chapter examines the reasons behind the military defeat of the Derg.

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The Fall of Mengistu and the Derg

An inquiry into the reasons why ethnonationalist armed resistances defeated the Derg even though it had many advantages over them unravels the deep atony of the regime under a semblance of military strength. However, the explanation of the defeat exclusively by military criteria would be too narrow and simplistic, for on closer look the military reversal was a direct reflection of the contradictions developed during the revolutionary process. To account for the defeat is thus to show how negative developments, all directly or indirectly associated with Mengistu Haile Mariam's leadership, finally prevailed leading the revolutionary process to an impasse that favored armed insurgents. Let us first tackle with the military situation.

Dedication and Efficient Resistance

After seventeen years of uninterrupted and increasingly widening guerrilla wars, the military defeat of the Derg was consumed when Mengistu fled the country and the TPLF troops marched into Addis Ababa in May 1991, while the EPLF captured Asmara. A TPLF dominated interim government was soon established whose landmark achievements are the recognition of the independence of Eritrea in May 1993 and the adoption and implementation of a system of ethnic federalism for the rest of the country.

That successive military defeats primarily caused the collapse of the Derg is by no means easy to explain, given that the Derg was by far superior to the EPLF and TPLF in terms of military arsenal and human resources. It had created a large and well-armed military machine thanks to a massive Soviet military assistance, while the guerrilla movements mostly relied on themselves, even if external assistance, especially from the Sudan and other Arab countries, was not

negligible. The view that "the regime developed the largest and best-equipped armed forces in Sub-Saharan Africa," is supported by the following figures:

Military expenditure amounted to a steady 10% of Ethiopia's Gross National Product annually (Eshetu, 1989: 94). Estimates of the personnel strength of the Armed Forces varied from 250,000 to 300,000. The forces fielded an impressive and essentially Soviet-supplied order of battle with roughly: (1) 800 tanks, numerous armored cars and a wide range of artillery; (2) 150 combat aircraft, 50 helicopters and also numerous missiles of all kinds; (3) 2 frigates and a dozen of patrol craft.¹

Yet, despite its impressive size and equipment, the Ethiopian army was gradually weakened by outnumbered and outgunned guerrilla insurgencies: it was already driven out of Tigray and of most Eritrean towns, with the exception of Asmara and the port of Assab, when the TPLF troops closed on Addis Ababa. Given the large military disparity, how were the insurgents able to shift the balance in their favor?

In the eyes of the winners and their supporters, the defeat of the Derg is a David-and-Goliath story in that the superior dedication, organizational ability, and efficiency of the insurgents overcame the considerable material and human advantages of government troops. Their great dedication fed on a stubborn resistance and translated into incessant attacks that wore out Mengistu's military machine. The intensity of the commitment also explains the readiness to die and the higher propensity to submit to organizational discipline. As to organizational efficiency, it fully compensated for the inferiority in terms of human and material resources. Both a better leadership quality and a firm organizational discipline gave the insurgents the effectiveness they needed to defeat a much bigger opponent. In the words of a scholar, "what they lacked in armaments and numbers, the insurgents made up for with competent leadership, skill, mobility, motivation, courage, determination and perseverance."²

Since the explanation boils down to saying, as implied in the biblical story, that material power was defeated by higher subjective qualities, the question is to know why the insurgents possessed such superior qualities. Short of providing racist explanations, the only alternative left is to derive their superior qualities from the rightness of the insurgents' cause. In effect, the last chapter has underlined the efficiency of ethnonationalism: as a highly competitive ideology, it shapes a committed and united leadership while the involvement of powerful sentiments associated with identity gives it a high level of mobilizing ability.

As we saw, the combination in Tigray of economic destitution with cultural oppression and political marginalization had sprouted a disgruntled elite amidst a highly mobilizable population. Indeed, the TPLF grew in a situation where the peasantry was mobilizable more than anywhere else in Ethiopia. Tigrean peasants faced conditions of existence made much harder by ecological disasters, such as drought, famine, and displacement. Contrary to southern peasants, the

radical reforms of the Derg did not improve in any way the condition of life of Tigrean peasants; rather, the ravages of continuous war and displacement worsened it. To this material destitution was added the traditional rivalry between Tigray and Amhara elites, which the Derg's policy of greater centralization further aggravated, thereby producing an elite galvanized and united by resentment. The unity was almost total since the elimination of the privileges of the traditional elite by the nationalization of all assets created conditions facilitating the alignment of Tigrean nobility and church with Tigrean radicals. The objective conditions and the spiritual responses to them thus contributed to the generation of a widespread belligerence that sustained the resistance of the TPLF. Aregawi Berhe summarizes the reasons why the TPLF was able to mobilize the people of Tigray and defeat a much bigger adversary thus:

The answer lies in the interplay of many factors, among them the active participation of ordinary people (the "masses"), the will of the fighting force, well-thought-out strategy and tactics, competent leadership focused on the cause, and, to a certain extent, external support, as is the case in almost every war waged by an inferior force against a superior government army.³

The belligerent qualities of the TPLF and the favorable conditions that allowed it to overrun a bigger military force were also those of Eritrean insurgents, with the added factor of a different history resulting from the Italian colonization, the federal experience, and its termination. This different history could not but aggravate the sense of cultural oppression and political subordination by a feudal regime perceived as backward and hence as stifling the advancement of Eritrea already accomplished under the Italian colonial rule. The sense of being pulled back by a backward regime was liable to spread frustration and forge an indignant and recalcitrant elite highly receptive to an ethnonationalist appeal. The different history of Eritrea explains the rise of armed resistance even before the overthrow of Haile Selassie. According to an Eritrean author, the answer to the question of how and why the EPLF prevailed is simply "tenacity and resilience of the Eritrean people in all aspects," which are spiritual responses to a decaying situation judged all the more unacceptable as it is caused by a regime perceived as both foreign and regressive.⁴

There is no doubt that these ethnonationalist tendencies in Eritrea and Tigray were greatly strengthened by the repressive response of the Derg. Far from trying to accommodate some of the demands, the Derg decided to crush the insurgents, thereby adopting an all-out repressive policy. The indiscriminate nature of this repression gave people no other alternative than to support the armed groups. Popular support also grew, with more people directly joining the fight, as government troops increasingly exposed their inability to crush the armed resistances.

Some Critical Facts

The presentation of the Derg's defeat in terms of material force versus spiritual superiority would have been convincing were material conditions unhelpful to Eritrean and Tigrean insurgents. What is more, the intimation that the Ethiopian army was devoid of determination and efficiency is also questionable. Likewise, the explanation of the defeat of the Derg by the superior subjective attributes of the TPLF and EPLF can hardly overlook the input of assistance provided by countries traditionally hostile to Ethiopia. In particular, the location of Eritrea provided the EPLF with an elongated access to the Sudan, which supported the secessionist agenda of the insurgents. In addition to using the Sudan as a transit facility for weapons coming from outside, the EPLF created military bases protected from Ethiopian attacks.

An even more important factor that tarnishes the account of the defeat by spiritual superiority is the undeniable contribution of the topography both in Eritrea and Tigray. The topographical factor does not quite allow the image of David confronting and defeating Goliath if only because it reduces the material superiority of the Derg. Thus, Aregawi admits that "the rugged topography of Tigray presented an immeasurable advantage to the TPLF. Tigray and the entire northern part of Ethiopia offer an ideal terrain for guerrilla warfare."⁵ The terrain is even more appropriate in Eritrea, especially in the Sahel, where major and prolonged battles took place. The area is aptly described as "a barren topography . . . [of] intricate maze of soaring mountains, parched valleys and ravines, and treacherous slopes."⁶ In the words of an Eritrean, "the terrain of Sahel provided a natural advantage to the EPLF and both (the terrain of Sahel and the EPLF) made a perfect match, proving to be a death trap of the Task Forces of the Derg."⁷ Such acknowledgements contrast with the view of some supporters hailing the determination and efficiency of Eritrean fighters who, they say, fought with a ratio of "1 to 4 and in some battles . . . [of] 1 to 9," when military strategists maintain that the ratio of 3 to 1, necessary for a successful offensive under normal topographical condition, must be significantly higher in mountain warfare.⁸

Insofar as the topography did not allow the Derg to fully profit of its superiority in number and weaponry, especially by singularly reducing the effective use of tanks, planes, and heavy artillery and by making communication and motorized mobility difficult, no account of the outcome of the war is credible if it is simply posited in terms of subjective superiority versus material force. To say so does not diminish the determination and effectiveness of the insurgents, which are undeniable; rather, these qualities would not have persisted without the protection provided by the topography. Seeing how insurgencies in Ogaden and other parts of Ethiopia, though inspired by an ethnonationalism as furious as those of northern insurgents, could not stand the assaults of the Derg and quickly weakened to the point of extinction, it is hard to deny the significant contribu-

tion of the topography in the success of the TPLF and EPLF. Let us then agree with Niccolo Machiavelli when he says: "more important is the valor of soldiers than their numbers; more benefit comes at times from topography than from valor."⁹

What further undermines the excessive emphasis on spiritual superiority is the fact that the Ethiopian military was not devoid of determination. One cannot speak of a war that lasted seventeen years without assuming parity in terms of determination between the warring factions. Not only is seventeen years a long time, but also the enormous cost both in material terms and in human life that the Ethiopian military paid is a patent testimony of the Ethiopian determination to prevent the secession of Eritrea. To give an idea of the human cost, in the Sahel alone, the estimate is "a combined total of 43,000 killed and maimed. Government casualties were 37,176 (27 percent) and the insurgents may have been as high as 15,000 (58 percent)."¹⁰ For the total human cost of the war in Eritrea on the Ethiopian side, Dawit W. Giorgis gives the staggering figure of 180,000 to 200,000 killed and 80,000 to 100,000 wounded or maimed.¹¹ We get a better appreciation of the level of determination on the Ethiopian side when we take note of the fact that despite successive defeats the army continued to fight even as all hope of reversing the situation was lost. It gave up fighting only when Mengistu fled the country so that this tenacity "clearly related to the army's attitude toward the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and its determination to try to keep Eritrea," which determination "kept Mengistu in power for so long" despite his growing unpopularity.¹²

As to the issue of efficiency, the problem is that some accounts of the insurgents' victory so exaggerate the discrepancy that they greatly diminished its merit. For instance, one Eritrean writes: "the Ethiopian military apparatus was more intimidating than effective."¹³ The more the Ethiopian army is presented as a paper tiger, the more the alleged efficiency of the insurgents becomes a relative matter, with the consequence that one wonders why it took so long to defeat it. More seriously, the explanation of the military defeat by the lack of efficiency does not sit well with known accomplishments of the Ethiopian army. It is hard to imagine a situation as desperate as the one that the army faced in 1977, when the Somali army invaded Ethiopia. The invading army advanced quickly, occupied the Ogaden, and threatened the towns of Harar and Dire Dawa. At the same time in the north, Eritrean liberation fighters controlled most of Eritrea, with the exception of three towns. Internally, the Derg was seriously hampered by an extensive urban guerrilla warfare launched by the EPRP. Both the political and military situations were so desperate that most observers predicted the imminent collapse of the Derg, the secession of Eritrea, and the victory of the Somali forces.

Within a year the situation had totally changed: not only did the Derg survive and become considerably stronger, but also the Somali invasion was defeated, the EPRP crushed, and most of Eritrea was taken back from the insurgents. Undoubtedly, a major factor in the reversal of the situation was the massive military assistance of the Soviet Union and Cuba, which, however, does

not tell the whole story. The military assistance would not have produced the reversal if the Ethiopian army had not resisted both in the eastern and northern fronts. In effect, the Ethiopian army, though "outnumbered . . . in mobile battalions, tanks, combat aircraft, artillery, armor, and armored personnel carriers," stopped the Somali advancement, thus giving time for a reorganized, better equipped, and enlarged counteroffensive. In the words of Gebru Tareke, "the Somalis were ultimately checked from achieving their aim by the Ethiopians who fought them to a deadlock for six grueling months. By stabilizing the front on their own, the Ethiopians turned the situation in their favor. In essence, they won by not losing."¹⁴ No less impressive was the success of the Derg in Eritrea: "In mid-1978 the government opened a three-pronged counter-offensive and in barely four months recaptured all the towns, except Nakfa in Sahel district, and much of the countryside where the bulk of the population lived. It was a grave setback for the nationalists."¹⁵

These achievements certainly challenge the view describing the Ethiopian army as inefficient and require an explanation of its defeats in Tigray and Eritrea in the late 1980s and early 1990s in other terms than the lack of determination and efficiency. Not that the army did not suffer from the lack of efficient leadership, adequate training, and a steady deterioration of its determination. Serious studies of the war in Eritrea and Tigray expose various shortcomings that they support by convincing facts. However, their explanatory power depends on how well they originate the shortcomings from induced incapacities rather than from the natural superiority of the insurgents. What is needed is an approach showing how the qualities that the Ethiopian army had demonstrated in the late 1970s were progressively undermined and the main causes for the deterioration. This approach operates a displacement: the focus of the explanation of the defeat decidedly moves from the Ethiopian army to the political leadership.

Confidence Crisis

One thing is sure: the ethnonationalist insurgencies would not have been able to score decisive victories without the Derg's regime showing an inverse tendency toward weakness. As already indicated, insurrections overthrow regimes less because they are powerful than because they face weakened governments. So, given the Derg's impressive military machine, the whole question is: what factors so weakened the state that it could not take advantage of its military superiority?

One view ascribes the military defeat of the Derg to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The evolution of the Soviet policy under Mikhail Gorbachev had already diminished, so it is argued, the flow of arms and the active military and diplomatic support of the Soviet Union. The ideological discredit of socialism and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union were the final blow that undermined the morale of the army. This explanation simply forgets that "the military

supplies from the Soviet Union had continued to trickle almost to the last days of the regime. Also, there was no report of shortage of weapons at all."¹⁶ Obviously, even if the Soviet Union had remained ideologically intact and as committed as before to assist the Derg, the assistance would have perhaps prolonged the war, but it would not have changed the outcome. The huge military machine had almost ceased to fight in the late 1980s, undermined as it was by a severe and generalized demoralization and an acute crisis of leadership.

Andargachew Tiruneh is right when he identifies the major cause as "crisis in confidence" affecting not only the military but also the whole society.¹⁷ An unhappy combination of circumstances with structural factors amplified the crisis. Not only did the insurgents register important military gains, but also the economic failures of the regime and the collapse of the socialist camp combined to aggravate the loss of confidence. To quote Andargachew:

The importance of the change in the international political scene appears to have been, not in starving the regime of weapons, but, rather, in disorientating it by creating a confidence crisis among its erstwhile supporters (party functionaries, government officials, and military officers) and by depriving it of friends on the international scene.¹⁸

Notably, the mounting discredit of the socialist ideology and the end of the Cold War could not but erode the fighting will of the military. Who wants to die for an idea that has completely lost currency after having been extolled to the skies? The international discredit of socialism together with the tangible proofs of its economic failure in Ethiopia gravely sapped the morale of party functionaries and military officials. In effect,

the apex of the state's crisis came with Mengistu's renunciation of Marxism-Leninism in March 1990 when he announced to the people, over the heads of his officials, that the private sector would be given a free hand and that WPE would be replaced by a multi-party system.¹⁹

The loss of popular support after the euphoria caused by the revolutionary measures becomes obvious when we compare the military situation of the late 1980s and early 1990s with that of 1977-78. The Derg was able to reverse the desperate 1977 military situation thanks to a massive military assistance from the Soviet Union and Cuba, it is true, but also to the mobilization of a militia force of 100,000 men incorporated into the army. Clearly, though in military terms the situation in the late 1980s was comparable to that of 1977, the Derg was not able to bounce back because it had lost its mobilizing capacity. The fervor and hope created by the revolutionary measures of the 1970s was the main reason why the people, especially peasants, responded so massively to Mengistu's appeal: "Everything to the war front." By the late 1980s, the revolutionary enthusiasm was gone; it was replaced by resignation, disbelief, and cynicism.

What particularly precipitated the popular disaffection was the widespread disappointment over the economic failures of the regime. By all measures, the

Ethiopian economy had declined, even from what it used to be during the imperial regime. No one could deny that the entire society, including the lowest classes, were better off under the imperial regime. According to Christopher Clapham, "there can be no doubt at all that, since the revolution, living standards in both city and countryside have declined dramatically."²⁰ For instance,

between the outbreak of the revolution and 1980, urban living standards declined by over half for highly paid workers and nearly a third for low paid workers; and with a further sharp rise in food prices since then, this decline has certainly continued. Salary scales have remained unchanged since the early 1970s, despite inflation.²¹

Consequently, all the revolutionary measures had lost their aura and were seen as destructive mistakes. And as the repressive policy and brutality of the regime did nothing to compensate for economic deprivations, the frustration kept on growing.

While this sharp economic deterioration, together with successive military defeats, accounts for the drastic melting of popular support, it does not explain why the Derg did not face serious social unrests. After all, the ingredients of social uprisings were forcefully present: the military force was weakened and dissatisfied by continual defeats and the society at large was frustrated as a result of a generalized condition of deprivation. True, the extremely repressive nature of the Derg may have dissuaded the explosion of wide social unrests. However, this explanation cannot be extended to the last two years when the regime was so weakened that people had even become openly critical, including the rank and files of the official party.

It seems that two conditions necessary for the eruption of social unrest were missing. The one is the absence of inciting and mobilizing groups: more than a decade of severe and systematic repression had completely drained the country of rebellious groups, including among students, except those engaged in guerrilla warfare. The other condition was the absence of a privileged class against which lower classes could rebel. The socialist policy had almost succeeded in generalizing poverty; at any rate, it did not display the frustrating picture of a system favoring the few at the expense of the majority. People hated the regime because of its failures and violence, but did not have the feeling that it favored a particular class. The material decline was general and shared. Even those people who showed some economic improvements (merchants, for example) owed their gains to illegal means and were constantly complaining against the regime. As to party and government officials, their higher standard of life came more from bribes than from their official incomes. In a word, because failure rather than the protection of a privileged class defined the rule of the Derg, resignation prevailed over anger, especially among lower classes.

If the people did not rise against the state, neither were they ready to support it. What defines them best was withdrawal mixed with a wait-and-see atti-

tude. When you oppose this generalized depression and uncertainty to the assurance and optimism of ethnonationalist movements, confidence crisis does stand out as the palpable factor undermining the military and political leadership as well as the support of the people. If we dig further into the crisis, we find remote and deeper factors directly stemming from Mengistu's leadership, more exactly, from his narcissistic personality acting as an independent variable.

Leadership Bankruptcy

All things considered, the defeat of the Derg can be traced back to its major mistake, namely, the elimination of the civilian left. The party created by Mengistu, the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), has never been a substitute for the simple reason that it was unable to replace the devotion and professionalism of the cadre of leftist organizations. It was an artificial party, mostly composed of arrivistes, since the main criterion for recruitment was "loyalty [to Mengistu] rather than ideological commitment."²² Such a party was incapable of mobilizing the people; graver yet, it was unable to counter the growing perception of a gap between theory and practice among the cadre. The display of ideological dereliction and corruption encouraged the spread of skepticism and hence the loss of confidence in leadership at various levels of state and party apparatuses.

The party's failure to mobilize the masses, which was a fallout of its mode of formation, provides the key element to its defeat. Indeed, the only condition by which a sustained fight against ethnonationalist movements could be waged was through the constant mobilization of the working masses. The party's inability to provide leadership primarily sprang from the fact that it was designed to serve the ambition of a dictatorial leader. As such, the party acted as a repressive weapon, less so as an instrument of mobilization. Moreover, the predominance of arrivistes created the tendency to undermine the socialist transformations by illegal practices, such as bribe, corruption, and all forms of nepotism. Not only did these practices erode the socialist policy, but they also filled the various leadership positions within the party and the government with incompetent and cynical people. Even if competent people were not absent, the prevailing unconditional alignment to the commands of a dictator did not allow them to have any meaningful input. Even those who had strong leftist convictions, as was the case of some members of the Politburo of the Workers Party of Ethiopia, were in the compromised situation of former leaders who were rewarded for helping Mengistu crush their own organization.²³

Though Mengistu was perfectly aware of these grave deficiencies in the party, he could do nothing to correct them, as they were the conditions for his dictatorial rule. Only an entourage composed of incompetent, greedy, and cynical yes-men posed no danger for his absolute power. Inversely, nothing suited better the needs of corrupt and inept people than an arbitrary and dictatorial regime. Without doubt, then, "the politico-military crisis of the state, which is, arguably, the most central cause for the decline and collapse of the regime,

flowed from the excessively centralized and autocratic nature of the regime and from the attendant lack of the rule of law."²⁴

Leadership crisis is central because economic failures, though they caused wide dissatisfaction, are not enough to explain the collapse of the Derg. Were material deprivations enough, no socialist country would have lasted more than a decade. As Samuel P. Huntington notes, under socialism "the less their food and material comfort the more people come to value the political and ideological accomplishments of the revolution for which they are sacrificing so much."²⁵ The ideological and political gains of the socialist state compensate for material deprivations otherwise considered intolerable in other regimes. Even if they fail to improve life materially, these gains valorize the working masses and actively associate them with the construction of socialism. To the extent that the masses are valorized, they see deprivations as necessary sacrifices for the preparation of a better future.

Mengistu's party was totally unable to keep up the popular fervor. As an instrument of control rather than of leadership, it was filled with people who owed loyalty more to Mengistu than to the idea of socialism. In consequence, the party could not counter the slow drift of the working masses away from the political leadership as each passing year intensified economic deprivations. The inability to infuse importance and hope accelerated the divorce between the working masses and the political elite.

The Self-Defeating Tendency of Narcissism

The ascription of the defeat to Mengistu's flawed leadership must make sure to have all the facts in place. Indeed, seeing the pitiful end of socialism in Ethiopia and the collapse of the national army, one would be tempted to speak of Mengistu as a "pretentious leader" with no leadership quality whatsoever.²⁶ The problem with this one-sided approach is that the emphasis on the defects of Mengistu turns his rise to and control of absolute power for more than a decade into an utter mystery. That from among one hundred twenty men, Mengistu rose to the position of absolute rule, even though many of his rivals were better placed, is an achievement that requires palpable leadership qualities. That the Derg survived even when many people had predicted its imminent collapse by defeating the EPRP, the Somali invasion, and Eritrean insurgents is another achievement that is attributed to Mengistu's leadership.

The way out is to make a distinction between Mengistu as an aspirant to power and Mengistu as an established leader. In Chapter 14, we saw that Dawit, who had the opportunity to observe Mengistu closely, noticed a significant change of behavior as he consolidated his power. At first he admired Mengistu because he looked humble, genuine, and far-sighted; but with the consolidation of his power, his personality changed to the point that Dawit concluded that his first personality was only a pretense. The observation is not simply confirming

the common view on the corrupting nature of power; it is actually a hint into the narcissistic personality of Mengistu, since Dawit explicitly stated that the first personality was only a disguise, a manipulation for his bid for support.

To understand how Mengistu, who showed remarkable leadership qualities to save the Derg and achieve absolute power, blew up everything by losing the war to insurgents with less material means, no better way exists than to unravel the negative or dark side of his narcissism. The advantage of such an approach is that the same cause explains both his success and failure; more accurately, it shows that success unleashes the negative components, thereby inducing a self-defeating tendency that brings about the fall of the leader. As one author notes, the psychological characters of the narcissist

may have some advantages in rising to power, and his behavior may be an effective response to some real-life factors, but once he has consolidated his position his reality-testing capacities diminish. Fantasies held in check when his power is limited are apt to become his guides to action. As a consequence, his behavior becomes more erratic, he runs into difficulties in meeting his goals, and his paranoid defenses become more exaggerated.²⁷

Clearly, what underscores the explanatory power of narcissism is that it avoids two pitfalls: one, the presentation of Mengistu as an accomplished leader, whose weakness is that it cannot explain his fall; two, the view of Mengistu as a mediocre leader, which fails to explain his rise and other accomplishments. The merit of the concept of narcissism is that it enables us to see how his very success led him to falter over time, unable as he became to sustain effective leadership.

Recklessness and Paranoia

Since the fall of Mengistu and of the socialism he incarnated were the direct consequence of his military failure against northern insurgents, the best way of showing the impact of narcissism is to demonstrate how it undermined the efficient conduct of the war. One of the salient vices of narcissism is arrogance, which itself is the consequence of grandiosity stemming from the need to stifle feelings of inferiority by self-admiration and adulation by others. As we saw, grandiosity explains the narcissistic leader's obsession with absolute power. To speak of obsession is to unravel the other major vice of narcissism, namely, constant paranoia induced by a deep lack of trust. Narcissistic leaders need to control everything because they trust no one, because their wounded self and inferiority complex feed an unceasing suspicion. What is more, inasmuch as their personality springs from an injured self, they harbor a deep anger that makes them prone to excessive cruelty that they are not always able to control. From these major flaws result beliefs and practices that progressively hamper their initial success.

The trouble is that "the narcissist's faults tend to become even more pronounced as he becomes more successful."²⁸ Far from tempering the arrogant

tendency, success increases it to the point that narcissistic leaders develop overconfidence and a feeling of invincibility that lead them to harbor unrealistic projects. This was exactly the state of mind of Mengistu in 1978 and early 1980s when he successfully defeated the Somali invasion, insurgents in Eritrea, and all his competitors in the civilian left as well as his rivals in the Derg, thereby becoming the undisputed leader of the country. His major decision was the planning of the Red Star Campaign, which he launched in 1982 "to destroy, once and for all, the bandits entrenched in the mountains of Sahel and Barka and to establish lasting peace in the province of Eritrea."²⁹

Although five offensives had already failed to dislodge the insurgents from their stronghold in the Sahel mountains, the massive Red Star Campaign was announced with deafening fanfare and publicity, and so reflected Mengistu's sense of invincibility. Instead of inquiring into the reasons for the previous failures so as to come up with a new or a different strategy, Mengistu thought of becoming successful simply by making the offensive bigger. Nor did he feel the need to prepare and train the troops adequately in light of the previous failures. As one Eritrean writes, "blinded by their [Ethiopians] belief in armaments and numbers, their far superior foe neglected to correctly appraise the situation and improvise strategy accordingly."³⁰ The result was that the massive offensive failed; but worse, it seriously bled the Ethiopian army while greatly boosting the morale of Eritrean insurgents. In fact, the Campaign was "a turning point" in that the army "never regained fully its fighting spirit."³¹ Such a colossal failure was caused by none other than an outgrowth of invincibility, namely, stubbornness or rigidity. When narcissistic grandiosity reaches the level of invincibility, the recognition of mistakes and errors becomes intolerable inasmuch as it resurfaces the injured self that suffered from a sense of inferiority and inadequacy.

The rigidity by which Mengistu protected his projected self and saved himself the pain of reviewing his military strategy was all the more encouraged as he squarely blamed other people for his military debacles. Since accepting mistakes is painful for narcissists, their general tendency is to "blame others for their own failures and shortcomings."³² As we saw in Chapter 14, Mengistu put the entire blame for the military debacles in Eritrea and Tigray on senior officers' treasons and incompetence, even though he was the all-controlling and directing commander-in-chief. Of course, thanks to his delusional nature and propensity to lie, blaming other people for his own mistakes came easily to him. The major tragic consequence of the tendency to blame others is the reluctance to undertake a serious review of adopted strategic choices. So long as one thinks that the choices failed because they were badly implemented, one has little reason to critically assess them.

Another catastrophic outcome of the tendency to blame others for his own failings is that Mengistu often reserved death punishment to those accused of treason or incompetence. One famous case is the execution in front of his troops of Colonel Wubishet Mamo accused of being responsible for the failure of one

of the offensives of the Red Star Campaign. An even more notorious case is the execution of Brigadier General Tariku Ayene, the popular and able commander of the Nadew force in Af Abet. Mengistu disliked Tariku's critical attitude toward the overall military strategy of the government and accused him of being in league with the insurgents. Nothing could show better the disastrous consequences of his erratic behavior than the execution of Tariku, since in addition to shocking and angering senior officers, it contributed to a major military disaster, namely, the fall of Af Abet a month later. The loss of Af Abet was another turning point of the war since a garrison of 20,000 men was routed "with thousands killed and captured as well as whole units dispersed in fight; more important, large quantities of ammunition and weapons were seized, including about 50 tanks and 122mm artillery pieces."³³ To have an approximate clue of the terrorizing impact of Mengistu's arbitrary executions, one must include the case of many commanders who preferred to kill themselves rather than face a firing squad.

The Red Star Campaign is just one characteristic example of Mengistu's inability to adjust his goals to the available means. One way of weakening the Eritrean and Tigrean insurgencies was to create divisions by offering peace talks and concessions while maintaining the military pressure. The rejection of all serious negotiations gave the insurgents no other choice than pure submission or continued resistance. Yet the decision to annihilate the northern insurgencies by the use of force should have been perceived as unrealistic, given the already long-drawn resistance, the nature of the topography, and the support of neighboring countries to the insurgents. Mengistu could not contemplate a serious negotiated settlement for two main reasons stemming from his narcissism. First was his inability to admit his limitations since it offended his grandiosity; second was his obsession with absolute power, as negotiated settlement requires self-rule or autonomy and hence a limitation to his power. The consequence was rigidity to the point of foolishness. To fulfill his dream of grandeur he had to destroy all resistances regardless of the human and material costs incurred by the Ethiopian army. Unsurprisingly, the appalling costs of a reckless military strategy and a complete disregard for human life ended up by demoralizing the army. In thus using the national army for the achievement of his narcissistic obsessions, Mengistu behaved more as an abuser than as a commander-in-chief.

Most studies of the northern wars identify the establishment of a system of triangular command as one of the reasons for the defeat of the Ethiopian army. The system came out directly from Mengistu's abyssal paranoia and lack of trust, since it divided command by teaming up commanders, political commissars, and inspectors, thereby established a network of constant surveillance. The outcome was that commanders were no longer deciders, forced as they were to obtain the agreement of inspectors and commissars for the slightest operational initiative, not to mention administrative and promotion matters. Speaking of the damaging effect of this three-headed command structure, Teferra Haile-Selassie writes:

The commanders at the front were placed in a very difficult position of making strategic decisions independently. They had to consult military commissars, who were picked from the non-commissioned and junior officers, and inspectors of the Army. The triumvirate command, comprising a commander, a commissar, who was a political cadre, and an inspector, replaced the single command which is typical of any modern army. The system was effective in checking dissension in the Army, but killed the initiative of the officers and encouraged insubordination and indiscipline.³⁴

Because the system undermines the authority of commanders often by requiring them to get the consent of junior officers who had little knowledge of military strategy and tactics, it upset commanders and created animosity and divisions. Most importantly, this divided command undercut military hierarchy and the chain of command, resulting in a considerable loosening of military discipline. Some such outcome was most damaging since, as Machiavelli so succinctly puts it, "discipline does more in war than enthusiasm."³⁵

Though Mengistu was aware of the complaints of commanders, he chose to maintain the system rather than deprive himself of the tight surveillance and control, even if it weakened efficiency and caused defeats by undermining discipline and unity of command, not to mention the prevention of rapid mobility necessary to counter guerrilla attacks. Thanks to this omniscient system of surveillance and control, no one unit could move without his knowledge and approval, no commander could create a power base, and no important promotion was granted without passing the criterion of loyalty to him.

No less debilitating than the triangular command system was the paranoid preference of loyalty over competence and professionalism. The preference placed a major hindrance on the ability of the army to become a redoubtable fighting force under the leadership of efficient and skilled commanders. Even if the army was not devoid of able commanders, whatever impact they had was countered by the preponderance of sycophants who, in addition to being incompetent, flattered Mengistu's megalomania. The more Mengistu convinced himself that his military debacles were caused by treacherous senior officers, the more he became dependent on those who flattered and praised him, and the higher became his intolerance toward those who did not applaud his ideas. In thus surrounding himself with obsequious people, he aggravated the crisis of leadership plaguing the whole system.

So acute became his paranoia that to the blunder that caused the loss of Af Abet he added an even graver one by nominating Captain Legesse Asfaw governor of Tigray and placing everything under his authority, including military operations, as a response to the deteriorating military situation in the province. Legesse, who was a sergeant before the Revolution, had neither the experience nor the qualifications necessary for such a crucial position. He was appointed because he was feared and hated and, most of all, because he was loyal to Mengistu. With the express task of destroying the TPLF, his appointment was sup-

posed to provide the demonstration that the disloyalty of senior officers was indeed the main reason for the defeats of the army. After initial successes that resulted in the liberation of some towns, against the commander who advised consolidation, Legesse ordered the Third Revolutionary Army to pursue its offensive in the north even as the insurgents were regrouping and retaking the towns. In the end, the important garrison stationed at Shire found itself cut off from supply routes and reinforcements. It was soon ferociously attacked and destroyed by the insurgents, who thus scored so decisive a victory that Mengistu decided to evacuate Tigray altogether. According to Gebru, "to a large degree, Shire was the result of ineptitude; it demonstrated how gross incompetence could transform a military setback into a catastrophe."³⁶

As an outgrowth of Mengistu's insecurity, the primacy of loyalty over competence was extensively reflected in appointments and promotions to important positions. Add to insecurity the abhorrence of any criticism and dissent, invariably felt as excruciating offense to Mengistu's sense of grandeur, and you have a situation where important positions were given to people who lacked the necessary qualifications. A revealing case is that of Girma Ayele and Gebre Giorgis Birhane, who had both the rank of corporal in 1974; they became brigadier generals for "the services they rendered as political cadres within the army."³⁷ The imperative of loyalty is also why important military positions were given to Holeta graduates and course mates of Mengistu to the detriment of Harar Academy graduates, who were better trained and skilled. Such is the case with

Lieutenant General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, Defense Minister; Major General Gebreyes W/ Hana, Head of the political commissariat of the Army . . . ; Brigadier General Gebre Kiristos Buli, Head of the Campaign Department of the Derg; Brigadier General Abebe G/ Meskel, Head of the Military Security; Brigadier General Getaneh Haile, Head of the National Military Service; and Brigadier General Getachew Shibeshie, Commander of the Southern Front. All of them including Mengistu belong to the 19th course of the Holeta Military School.³⁸

The preference for Holeta graduates and course mates over Harar graduates aptly confirms how Mengistu's paranoia filled the upper echelon of the army with loyal but incompetent people. The preference has certainly prevented military coups, but it also made defeat inevitable in the hands of an insurgency resilient enough to profit of the impediments of an expanding incompetence.

The Backlashes of Ruthlessness

There is nothing of the advantages of narcissism that helped Mengistu prevail that did not turn into disadvantage when it became necessary to engage in a prolonged war. Thus, disregard for ethical principles and utter cruelty, which enabled Mengistu to triumph, blocked his adaptive ability, especially his comprehension of the need for a strategy other than the one emanating from the goal of overrunning the insurgents' strongholds in the mountains. Obviously, exclusive

reliance on material superiority persuaded Mengistu into adopting the strategy of submerging insurgents under the weight of a heavy numerical superiority in men and weapons. The assurance of a constant flow of recruits from the peasantry and weapons from the Soviet Union reduced the need for efficiency and downplayed the importance of adequate training. The strategy forced the insurgents into defensive tactics behind rugged mountains that resulted, as we saw, in high human attrition rate on the side of government troops. The decision to submerge the insurgents by sheer number thus precluded the design of strategies that focused on efficiency, both as a way to reduce human losses and sustain the fighting spirit. Little wonder the slow but continuous bleeding of government troops brought about demoralization and a significant drop in professional quality, which, in the long run, gave advantage to the insurgents.

One crucial aspect of the demoralization was the perception that the leadership was not only incompetent but that it was also indifferent to human life, as soldiers increasingly felt that they were sent to be slaughtered rather than to win battles. Sun Tzu had long ago warned about the critical role of care in the relations of commanders with their troops: "Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys. Look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death!" he said.³⁹ Indeed, if soldiers suspect that their life is needlessly sacrificed for a reckless and incompetent strategy, they lose their courage and disciplinary behavior. They follow leaders insofar as they perceive them to be caring, responsible, and competent. Is it surprising if the regular massacres caused by incompetence and disregard for life brought about demoralization among government troops?

Equally expressive of the mistreatment of troops were repeated miscarriages of justice and lack of due process as well as the disregard for the affective needs of the troops and their elementary rights. Among all the senior officers who were executed, demoted, or jailed, none saw his case decided according to military law and due procedures. Most of the decisions were arbitrary, even when there were court hearings, for the simple reason that Mengistu nominated the judges or overturned their decisions, as in the case of the execution of eleven generals accused of being participants in the failed *coup d'état* of 1989 (see Chapter 14). As to ordinary soldiers, though the official language praised them and defended their rights, in reality they were treated with so little concern that even food and clothing were often in short supply. Likewise, they were not allowed to visit their family for many years; many of them did not even know whether their family still existed. The infringement of the right to privacy requiring that private letters, sent or received, be first read and approved by political cadres was another cause of lingering discontent and frictions between officers and cadres. In his memoir of the war, one former officer does not hesitate to include such cases of mistreatment of the troops and disregard for basic rights as one of the reasons for the defeat of the army.⁴⁰

An inevitable manifestation of the self-defeating tendency of narcissistic leaders is that "in situations where . . . grandiosity itself is threatened, they are likely to react with extreme hypersensitivity and anger."⁴¹ The obvious downside is that the inability to control anger drives them to commit mistakes that precipitate their downfall. As we saw, Mengistu is a perfect example of self-destruction impelled by rage and revengefulness. For instance, the execution of General Tariku was just an angry and irrational reaction: it eliminated a much-needed able commander simply because his critical views against the governmental strategy offended Mengistu's grandiosity. An even more damaging manifestation was Mengistu's reaction to the 1989 *coup d'état* in which a majority of senior officers were directly or indirectly involved. The coup failed because Mengistu's loyalists, who mainly acted out of fear of rival generals, heard about the plot and counterattacked. The defeat of the rebellion yielded disastrous consequences in that it precipitated the final decapitation of the Ethiopian army. Many of the few remaining experienced and skilled generals were killed while the breakdown of military discipline reached an all-time high.

Since Mengistu's reaction to the coup resulted in nothing less than the literal decapitation of the army, it was impelled by an uncontrollable rage. Such a massive execution of senior officers meant that Mengistu was simply cutting the branch on which he was sitting. Clearly, the intensity of the rage even defeated his boundless fixation with power. Similarly demonstrative of his rage and revengefulness is the execution of many leaders of the civilian left even after he had put them in jail and dismantled their organizations.

That senior officers had to wait until the year 1989 to even attempt a coup is quite indicative of the structural impediments of the army. So shielded was Mengistu from revolts that they thought they had a chance of success only after the major disasters caused by the loss of Af Abet and the evacuation of Tigray had generated a wide anger. Even so, the coup failed and precipitated the demise of the army, thereby openly exposing the culprit, namely, Mengistu's self-destructive drive finishing in a final act of revenge the annihilation of what he himself had created. The failure of the coup even at the eleventh hour establishes that the war was lost for the main reason that removing Mengistu from power proved incredibly more difficult than defeating the insurgents. The story of the defeat is satisfactorily told only if what the insurgents were able to do is derived from the incapacities induced by Mengistu's crippling leadership.

To recapitulate, the doubled-edged nature of narcissism best explains Mengistu's rise and fall. While his decisiveness, authoritarianism, cunningness, and manipulative ability were good at seizing power, the negative components of his personality, namely, his paranoia, irascibility, cruelty, and sense of invincibility became severe handicaps in the conduct of a successful campaign against guerrilla warfare. Victory first depended on a political opening expressing the readiness to make concessions, which alone would have fractured the unity of the insurgents. Unfortunately, Mengistu's love of dictatorial power excluded any idea of concession leading to some form of power sharing. Victory also depended on local initiatives and swift actions. His paranoia and mania to control eve-

rything deprived the army of efficient leadership and of the freedom and mobility necessary to counter guerrilla warfare.

Mengistu succeeded in controlling dissensions by making the army vulnerable to the insurgents. Because he perceived the qualities that the army needed to win the war as threats to his rule, he chose to sacrifice the efficiency of the army to protect his power, even though he knew that his power was utterly dependent on military victory. Such is the eternal dilemma of dictators: the very measures that they take to safeguard their absolute rule are also those that weaken them. Last but not least, the explanation of the military defeat implicating narcissism vindicates the idea that the social will for change and national integration that triggered the Revolution was derailed by the actions of an individual, who thus evolved from being its product to being its wrecker.

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Why Social Revolutions Fail

In view of disastrous outcomes, should we conclude that nothing positive can be said about the Ethiopian Revolution? Indeed, in addition to the sharp and wholesale economic decline, the secession of Eritrea with its most damaging consequence, to wit, the fact of Ethiopia as a landlocked country, and the establishment of a perilous system of ethnic federalism, the seventeen years of the Derg's rule have caused untold human and material sacrifices. Without exaggeration, the rule can be described as a continuous civil war during which a great number of people either lost their lives or were forced to flee the country. Seeing the extent of the damages, how else can the Revolution be assessed but as a catastrophic occurrence devoid of any positive outcome?

How to Assess Social Revolutions

An unqualified denigration of the Ethiopian Revolution would be both amnesic and premature. All those countries that have gone through a similar type of social revolution have experienced, it is true with varying degrees, destructions and economic decline. Nevertheless, their historians have come up with sober judgments distinguishing negative outcomes from positive realizations. The point is that revolutions are not accidents; they are products of social impediments that are so deep-seated and extensive that they call for massive social upheavals and transformations. In light of the need of massive changes, an objective assessment of revolutions must not lose sight of the inevitability of negative developments.

Karl Marx's famous statement, "revolutions are the locomotive of history," means that violent forms of change are necessary for society to catch up with economic progress hampered by outdated relations of production and sociopolit-

ical institutions. Thus, the French Revolution eliminated the nobility and brought the bourgeoisie to power, thereby removing the combined obstacles of feudalism and royal absolutism. For Marx, as an outcome of class struggle, social change cannot be merely evolutionary; it requires a break in continuity as a result of which a radically different social system comes into being. Some such break is bound to cause extensive destructions, including harmful unintended consequences.

Modernization theory has developed a different approach by making revolution the exception rather than the rule. Revolution is not how history evolves, but how exceptional circumstances blocking evolution are removed. For modernization theory, "the actual experience of revolution is essentially a corrective to lagging social and political adjustments and a painful learning process of trial and (mostly) error."¹ Fully endorsing an evolutionary scheme, the theory maintains that society develops gradually. However, when an abnormal condition is created, such as the rise of autocratic regimes, society cannot reconnect with the evolutionary process unless a violent revolution removes the obstacle. While for Marx revolutions are necessary, being but the law of social change, they are corrective measures for modernization theory.

As argued in the beginning of this book, in light of the rarity of social revolutions, the position of modernization theory seems more pertinent than the Marxist view. An equally important argument in favor of modernization theory is that revolutions have overthrown autocratic, colonial, and dictatorial regimes, that is, undemocratic regimes, but no revolution has toppled a well-established democratic system. To be sure, fascist regimes have brought down democratic states, as in Germany, Spain, or Chile, but these states "were not consolidated democracies."² What all this suggests is that revolution is "a last, desperate resort that politically and economically deprived groups turn to when an undemocratic government refuses to address their demands, or to allow their expression."³

Barrington Moore's study of the French Revolution gives a noteworthy illustration of the view of modernization theory. For him, France had become a blocked society, that is, a society whose normal evolution was obstructed by abnormal developments, essentially due to royal absolutism and the conservative trend of the landed class. Unlike England where a fusion occurred between the landed class and the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the monarchy, in France "this fusion took place through the monarchy rather than in opposition to it and resulted . . . in the 'feudalization' of a considerable section of the bourgeoisie, rather than the other way around."⁴

This blockage of the liberal path would have engaged France in a conservative or fascistic type of modernization had the French Revolution not removed both absolutism and feudalism. "Without the Revolution," writes Moore, "this fusion of nobility and bourgeoisie might have continued and carried France forward into a form of conservative modernization from above, similar in its main

outlines to what took place in Germany and Japan."⁵ Thanks to the outbreak of the Revolution, the liberal section of the bourgeoisie, which was too weak to lead change because "royal absolutism had prevented its growing strong enough to accomplish much on its own . . . rose toward power on the backs of radical movements."⁶ In thus protecting France from fascistic drifts through the elimination of the class favoring authoritarian methods, the Revolution accomplished a commendable task.

Moore's conclusion contains an obvious tension. No doubt, revolution was necessary to remove royal absolutism, but this positive goal does not explain France's engagement in a type of change that brought about extreme and unnecessary consequences. Indeed, just as in the case of the Russian Revolution, moderates (Girondists) first controlled the Revolution until radicals (Montagnards) overthrew them. While the first phase was indeed necessary to correct the French anomaly, the second phase—the radical one—was altogether unnecessary and highly detrimental. In thus failing to make a distinction between social and political revolutions, Moore misses the point where the corrective revolutionary measures changed into a detrimental development. The latter prevented France from having a stable and sustained democratic society for many decades, one such detriment being the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Contrast Moore's analysis with Alexis de Tocqueville's view of the French Revolution. Tocqueville speaks positively of the first phase of the Revolution, which he characterizes as "a time of youth, enthusiasm, pride, a time of generous and sincere emotions, whose memory, despite its mistakes, will always be preserved by humanity."⁷ Unlike Moore, however, he is highly critical of the second phase. He sees a derailment and wants "to show what events, what errors and miscalculations, made those same French abandon their original course, and, forgetting liberty, desire nothing more than to become the equal servants of the master of the world."⁸ That the second phase ended in oppression and tyranny is to be explained primarily by the intervention of egalitarian utopia, which was the work of intellectuals, the most prominent being Maximilien de Robespierre and Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just. When the bloody and utopian episode came to an end, France resumed the normal process of gradual liberalization. What confirms the non-necessity of the radical episode is that the French Revolution "achieved by violent and drastic measures what America had accomplished by evolution: the promotion of a general equality of rank amongst all citizens."⁹

The need to reassess the French Revolution has led many scholars to challenge "the long-cherished belief that revolutions are inherently progressive, often necessary steps on the path to economic and political modernization."¹⁰ Seeing the recent trends of Russia and China toward liberalization, it is increasingly difficult to argue that they would not have been where they are now without going through the ordeal of social revolution. Common sense even says that the destructions and sufferings caused during the phase of social revolution were not only unnecessary, but also responsible for the delay in joining the inevitable

path of evolutionary transformations. Let us see whether a similar conclusion can be reached in the case of the Ethiopian Revolution.

Positive Views on the Revolution

Let us begin with the position of those scholars with a favorable assessment of the Ethiopian Revolution. They are not many, and most of them derive their positive assessment from their Marxist-Leninist commitment. This was particularly the case with scholars belonging to what was then called Eastern Bloc countries. Outside the socialist camp we find a scholar like Peter Schwab who writes that "for most Ethiopians the revolution has been beneficial, as it championed their needs."¹¹ The statement basically means that working people were liberated from undue economic exploitation and the shackles of feudal culture. But what about the boundless violence of the Derg, which even exterminated leftist groups? The answer is that violence was necessary to neutralize minority groups opposing the Revolution from the right as well as from the left. As Schwab explains, "to a large extent, the Dergue was often forced into the position of using extreme violence to achieve a successful revolution."¹²

In general, those who defend the Revolution are mostly sensitive to the radical transformations, the most important being the overthrow of the monarchy and the landed aristocracy. For them, the sensitivity to the lack of democracy and the use of dictatorial and violent methods must not conceal the positive outcomes of the Revolution. As in any other revolution, there are gains and setbacks. The gains are obvious: the past is gone to never come back and the country is liberated from the shackles of an outdated and frozen social system. The setbacks too are obvious, but the whole question is to know whether the setbacks were not necessary to achieve the gains. Was not the emergence of a revolutionary and ruthless power necessary to dismantle an entrenched regime that combined class and imperial domination with ethnic hegemony? Such a regime was not reformable so that there was no other choice but a radical revolution with all its risks and excesses.

Among the defenders of the Revolution, some even admit that failures were added to setbacks. Thus, Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, though Marxist, concede that "the post-revolutionary order has established neither full equality between social groups nor equality between nationalities, and it has not set up anything that might be termed a democratic political order."¹³ However, what needs to be kept in mind is that

such failings are not unique to the Ethiopian revolution. . . . While revolutions can transform for the better the lived conditions of the oppressed, no revolution produces a perfect society, or the one that most of those who participate in it expect at first to see: the Ethiopian revolution is no exception to this generalization.¹⁴

The tightening of centralizing means and the use of violent and dictatorial methods of government have defined revolutions in France, Russia, China, and elsewhere. But these downsides must be weighed against tangible improvements in the conditions of life of working masses, just as they must be viewed in connection with the formidable obstacles that made revolution necessary.

Negative Views

Scholars who oppose such a favorable assessment raise the objection that the Ethiopian Revolution did not bring about any improvement in the conditions of life of working people. On the contrary, the sweeping measures of nationalization caused a generalized and severe economic decline. Politically, it generated a regime more dictatorial and violent than the imperial regime. Moreover, it brought about military defeats whose consequence was the loss of Eritrea and the promotion of ethnic parties. Because conditions went from bad to worse, for many observers the Revolution was simply an "unqualified disaster."¹⁵ Thus, for Andargachew Tirunch, though extensive transformations have occurred, none of them induced an iota of improvement. Given that "revolutions are or can be progressive . . . if they can bring about change for the better," it is inconsistent to qualify the Ethiopian transformations as positive.¹⁶ Far from Ethiopia having gone through a positive revolutionary process, it "is in desperate need of another revolution from above, below or an intermediate social group to undo some of what has already been done and much of what continues to be done."¹⁷

Among those with a negative judgment, we find the position of the followers of the EPRP and of scholars like John Markakis, who maintain that the Derg was a counterrevolutionary regime. For such people, the economic and political failures confirm the counterrevolutionary nature of the Derg. What else, they ask, could the fake socialism of the Derg produce but such negative economic and political outcomes? The error is to assign these failures to socialism when socialism was not even applied.¹⁸ We must take these failures for what they really are, that is, the failures of a fascistic regime.

Closely related to the thesis of counterrevolution is the position of those scholars who argue that the Derg's transformations revealed more continuity with past practices than change. Rather than a real shift, "they believe the changes wrought by the regime to be superficial, concealing a present-day and likely future continuity in the underlying socioeconomic and political realities in the country."¹⁹ Notably, the nature of the Ethiopian state under the Derg showed much continuity with the imperial regime. Unsurprisingly, ethnonationalist scholars defend the idea that continuity prevailed over change. Despite the radical measures, the Derg neither abolished the "colonial" hegemony of the Amhara over other ethnic groups nor demolished the centralized character of the Ethiopian state.

Good Intention and Reality

The major problem with the above positions is that, directly or indirectly, they purport that revolution simply did not occur in Ethiopia. Because what they expect did not come to pass, they conclude that revolution did not happen or was overthrown. According to Christopher Clapham, what makes these positions biased is their teleological approach, the very one attributing to revolution the goal of realizing ideal aspirations. So that, "if it is accepted that the benefits to be provided by revolution have not been achieved, then it follows equally ineffectually that the event concerned cannot have been a 'real' revolution at all."²⁰

For Clapham, as indicated in Chapter 1, the changes that took place in Ethiopia are comparable to those of the French or Russian Revolutions.²¹ Instead of denying the qualification of revolution because the outcomes did not meet expectations, the scholarly approach is to inquire whether these outcomes were not themselves necessary results and, as such, independent of the intentions of the main actors. This kind of approach focuses on structural conditions and understands the outcomes, not in terms of intentions, but as changes occurring under inherited objective factors. Rather than speaking in terms of either transformation or continuity, such an approach analyses the Ethiopian Revolution as an outcome both of transformation and continuity.

In advocating an exclusively structuralist approach in the manner of Theda Skocpol, Clapham faces the objection according to which the attempt to define revolution without its teleological component does not make much sense. Revolution is not an unconscious process; it is where human aspirations and passions acquire a significant role. In particular, social revolution cannot be defined without the goal of changing for the better the conditions of life of lower classes. Its radical measures are not intelligible outside the inspiration imparted by utopian ideologies. It follows that the disparity between the original intention and the actual outcome cannot be used to discard the role of intention. On the contrary, one must defend the idea that social revolutions fail or do not give what they promise because utopian goals inspire them. Their vision transcends the existing reality, and this transcendence is neither an accident nor a posterior occurrence; it is what defines social revolutions. As Forrest D. Colburn puts it, "the brutal confrontation of dreams with intractable political and, especially, economic realities well explains the dispiriting outcomes of contemporary revolutions."²²

Instead of downplaying the impact of intention in favor of structural factors, the correct approach is to pinpoint conditions allowing the rise of groups committed to utopian ideas. This study has established that both the radicalization of the Ethiopian educated elite and the emergence of the Derg were the products of a blocked society. Blockage is not normal; it is a hampered evolution. Revolution is necessary to unblock the normal process of evolution. But here contingency intervenes: while political revolution is enough to unblock the process of change, conditions can become such that radical groups advocating utopian ide-

ologies emerge and seize power, thereby leading the society toward the path of social revolution. This is to say that political revolution, necessary in all blocked social systems, always carries the risk of allowing radical groups to come to power. Most countries have succeeded in preventing the danger, as in the case of the American or English Revolutions. Few countries were unsuccessful, and so became the scene of what scholars call "the great revolutions."

My contention is that the path taken by Ethiopia is exactly the path of political revolution hijacked by an extremist military group, even though the commitment to utopia was originally the fact of students and intellectuals. The atmosphere of radicalism created by the educated elite facilitated the emergence of the Derg which, owing to its unconventional composition and appearance, could not rule otherwise than through a policy of radical social change. The Derg is not counterrevolution; it is an exasperation of a revolutionary process whose premises are found in the blockage of the imperial era. When Teshale Tibebu writes, "the Derg was as much a product of the revolution as it was an active participant in it," the expression is correct provided it specifies that the Derg was like an unexpected pregnancy.²³ The error is to think that leftist organizations would have achieved better results both in terms of democratization and economic performance than the Derg were they not eliminated. Perhaps they would have avoided military defeats, but the confrontation between a utopian vision and inadequate material conditions would have instigated the same brutal method of government with similar economic results.

Let us go further: the tandem between utopianism and dictatorship is also how eccentric groups and individuals are provided with the opportunity of controlling power. This study of the Ethiopian Revolution has placed at the center the narcissistic personality of Mengistu Haile Mariam as a way of explaining both the victory of the radical wing of the Derg and the demise of the socialist episode. Chapter 4 established that powerful leaders, while being products of social needs, could also impart developments that transcend the social will, either in positive or negative ways. The source of this possibility is none other than the indetermination prevailing in situations of massive social upheavals. According to Max Weber, times of deep changes tend to favor the rise of charismatic leaders for the obvious reason that they promote leaders that no longer base their legitimacy on traditional criteria handed down from the past. Since revolutions challenge established forms of authority, the substitute for the sanctity of tradition becomes the charismatic appeal of leaders. Unlike traditional authority, "charismatic authority" emanates from "personal charisma"; it "repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force."²⁴

With the promotion of charisma, there emerges the possibility for individuals with psychopathic tendency to rise to power under cover of social change. Notably, the combination of deep social frustrations with utopianism offer considerable advantages to the grandiosity, love of power, determination, and unscrupulousness of narcissistic personalities. As we saw, the Ethiopian Revolution provides a perfect example of how a social situation of deep frustrations articulated by an educated elite prone to utopianism invited an usual military

coup that paved the way for the rise of Mengistu. The latter's narcissism responded well to both the social frustration and the needs of the Derg, but also created the conditions of his absolute power from which the impediments leading to setbacks and destructions originated. The lesson is that revolutions always run the risk of empowering destructive individuals because the removal of tradition takes away the norms by which society protects itself against antisocial groups and individuals. Between the new order not yet established and the past that is being discarded there lies a time of uncertainty that favors the dictatorial craving of narcissistic individuals. While most narcissists remain unknown and marginal, social upheavals offer opportunities for some of them to play a leading but, alas, in the end destructive role. Needless to say, narcissism aggravates the difficulty of the ideological modeling of society in that its destructive impulse enlarges further the disparity between the revolutionary discourse and the objective reality.

Because the structural conditions are refractory to the ideological inspiration, discrepancy is inevitable, economic setback being its first manifestation. Material failures and the resulting discontent create the conviction that violent methods have become necessary, which methods further intensify the crisis and deepen the disenchantment. Hence the importance of ideology both to understand the power of attraction of radical groups and the subsequent disenchantment once they are in power. Because "the ideas that drove contemporary revolutionary elites have been incompatible with the social and material realities of their respective polities," social revolutions have not only been unable to fulfill expectations, but they have also enthroned dictatorial forms of power.²⁵ Structuralist approaches are unable to explain the failure and the subsequent disenchantment of social revolutions so long as they discard the impact of ideology.

Heaven and Earth

The specific nature of a radical ideology adds an urge of a religious character to the goal of achieving material progress. Indeed, to the extent that social revolution is an attempt to make reality conformable to an ideal or utopian vision, it is ascribable to a religious inspiration. As such, it is by nature excessive, contradictory, and doomed to failure. As discussed in Chapter 4, what needs to be said here was already said by Alexis de Tocqueville long ago: the error of social revolutions lies in their utopian inspiration, which drives them to clash with the limits inherent in reality. Stressing this idea that revolutionaries strive for the regeneration of the human race rather than for the mere improvement of conditions of existence, Tocqueville characterizes the French Revolution as one that derailed from the political into the religious.

Consider again the American Revolution: it was successful because the revolutionary elite was wise enough not to venture into the business of establishing a utopian society, that is, a society that would be absolutely free while being at

the same time absolutely egalitarian. In thus separating what belongs to heaven from what is possible here on earth, American revolutionaries were able to moderate social demands. Insofar as this moderation avoided firing up social changes with heavenly promises, it kept the change within the limits of a political revolution. As Cheryl Welch remarks in his study of Tocqueville, "it was the genius of the Americans, he thought, to have hit on a form of organization . . . that allowed religious beliefs to constrain human nature without antagonizing the principle of popular sovereignty."²⁶ American revolutionary leaders were not tempted to build the kingdom of God on earth because their religious faith kept them focused on human limitations and on the impossibility, nay, the danger of utopian pursuits whenever humans overlook the ontological distinction between heaven and earth. They recognized the limitations so well that they designed a constitution based on the need to put checks and balances on those who exercise power. For them, the absolute is not of this world; to think otherwise leads to the folly of social revolutions.

The criticism does not mean that utopia must be rejected, but that it must be an inspiration rather than an object of material realizations. Since utopian beliefs transcend reality, they keep us unsatisfied with the given social order. As Karl Mannheim warns, "the complete elimination of reality-transcending elements from our world would lead us to a 'matter-of-factness' which ultimately would mean the decay of the human will."²⁷ The need for utopian inspiration must not, however, lose sight of the unbridgeable gap between reality and utopia. This comprehension is conducive to a reformist mentality that changes society through a progressive, evolutionary approach. With their persistence to force utopia on reality, social revolutions miss this fundamental truth and end up by contradicting their own goals.

The irony here is that Tocqueville throws back at Karl Marx the criticism that the latter labels against religion. When Marx characterizes religion as "the opium of the people," he accuses religious beliefs of providing an illusory escape from the real sufferings of the world. Yet what else are Marxist revolutionaries doing but justifying their unlimited power by the no less illusory promise of realizing here on earth the values of heaven? Rightly, Raymond Aron characterizes communism as "the opium of the intellectuals:" it is so because, flying above the constraints of reality, it carries the belief that utopia is realizable.²⁸

Ideology and Marginality

This study has ascribed the radicalization of the Derg to the longing for unlimited power. The Derg quickly and easily adopted the Marxist-Leninist ideology because it justified the absolute power that it needed to eliminate all other contending groups. Insofar as the socialist utopia promotes lower classes and advocates the concentration of all power in a few (if not one) individuals, it came in handy for the legitimization and consolidation of a marginal group of junior officers and NCOs. What is original in this study is, therefore, the idea that the commitment to utopian ideology is inextricably interwoven with consideration

of power conquest and consolidation. Groups adopt radical visions, not simply out of generosity, but also because it promotes their political ascension, especially when they feel either excluded or need the support of the masses to dethrone an entrenched elite. Their cultural deviation, that is, their proneness to deviant or utopian beliefs, agrees with their social marginality. Ideology, whatever its utopian content, is always harnessed to political empowerment. The more a group feels marginal, the higher becomes its propensity to espouse extremist agendas. Radicalism rhymes with social marginality: only the perspective of cultural outcasts can rise above usual preoccupations and unleash an overall change promoting marginality to social normativeness.

In the case of Ethiopia, Western education in conjunction with the blockage of social mobility first marginalized the educated elite in the sense that its political promotion became antithetical to the existing ruling class. As a result, it largely became attracted to the then dominant ideology of Marxism-Leninism.²⁹ This ideological extremism of the educated elite became quite inspirational to rebellious junior officers and NCOs, who thus adopted the same ideology to justify the exclusive appropriation of state power. The utopian content served well their need in that it eroded both the hierarchy of birth and education and ratified the rise of subaltern people. Be it noted that the same need to transform marginality into a social norm favoring particular groups explains the ethnonationalist ideology: just as the socialist ideology, ethnonationalism conjugates the enthronement of excluded elites with the ideal pursuit of emancipating and empowering dominated ethnic groups.

The cultural proneness to utopian beliefs, while reflecting the need to standardize social marginality, also carries a force all its own. The only way by which elites can demonstrate their entitlement to power to their constituency as well as to themselves is by presenting themselves as faithful and consistent executioners of the utopian vision. Consistency is the much-needed false consciousness persuading elites that they serve the vision rather than the other way round of using the vision to justify their political ambition. The latter case would only yield cynicism, which hardly agrees with the fanatical determination imparted by radical ideologies. The consistency they need to raise their marginality to the level of a norm drives revolutionaries to clash with the laws of reality. The subsequent conviction that more utopianism provides a way out only aggravates the conflict with reality.

The attempt to bend reality to a utopian vision results in the consolidation of a dictatorial form of government, itself frequently evolving toward the dictatorship of one man. All the same, since the evolution toward dictatorial rule simply widens the disparity between the original ideology and reality, it usually has a happy outcome: it converts more people to the necessity of reformism through the adoption of a moderate and realistic policy. This itinerary would have been that of the Ethiopian Revolution, were it not for the exclusory struggle for power unleashed by ethnonationalist marginalities, with the consequence that new op-

pressive regimes saddled with greater uncertainties are installed both in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thus, the Ethiopian case does not support Moore's analysis of liberalism rising to power on the back of radicalism: just as in France, in Ethiopia too the radicalism of the Derg ended in a military disaster that gave power to elites harboring a much more rigid and deleterious version of sectarianism.

To conclude, social revolutions fail and disappoint because of the inadequacy of the social reality. This is true, provided it is added that the inadequacy has its source in their utopian inspiration. Their failure is due less to objective deficiency than to the lavishness of their social projects. The reason for the excessive projects is found in the condition of the social empowerment of sectarian groups, that is, in their need to represent the working masses. The inevitable and ever-enlarging confrontation with reality brings about harmful developments—often in the form of a dictatorial rule—that seals the divide between the revolutionary state and the people that it claims to represent. The irony here is that social revolutions dispute Karl Marx's famous statement that "mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve," since the excess of their utopianism—itself necessary to empower sectarian groups—is one of the causes of their derailment.³⁰

Notes

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5. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 109.
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10. Jack A. Goldstone, "Introduction," in *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Farrokh Moshiri (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 2–3.
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14. Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 12–13.
15. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 229.

16. Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 343.
17. Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*, 343.
18. See Andargachew Tsege, *Nesanet Yemayawk Netsa Awchi* (n. p., 1997), 81.
19. John W. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post-Imperial State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 10.
20. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17.
21. See Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 1.
22. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries*, 77.
23. Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1995), 168.
24. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 362.
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27. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: A Harvest Book, 1936), 262.
28. Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, trans. Terence Kilmartin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962).
29. For more reading on this point, see Messay Kebede, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960-1974* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008).
30. Karl Marx, "Excerpt from A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 44.

Philosophical Extensions

Revolution raises in a dramatic way the old and most important problem of philosophy, namely, the relationship between mind and matter. The dramatization comes out each time theoreticians of revolution argue over the role of ideology in revolutions. Of all the various situations confronting human beings, revolution is where they manifest a high degree of active engagement to change their conditions of life. They seem to be altering those conditions through a conscious process that involves choices and the resolution to make the social reality conformable to their aims, whatever these aims may be. The question of knowing whether the alteration asserts human freedom or a determined outcome is, therefore, a legitimate philosophical question. This question of freedom connects with the debate between materialism and idealism, since humans are said to be active if their conscious involvement, which is expressed through ideas and beliefs, has a role transcending the mere conditioning power of structural causes. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss what some major theories of revolution have to say concerning the issue of human agency and the possible contributions of the Ethiopian Revolution in its clarification.

Exclusive Approaches

The paramount problem of the relationship between mind and matter first transpires in discussions stemming from the great complexity of social revolutions. Not only are revolutions never alike, but they also involve the interaction of a multitude of factors. In addition to occurring in a situation of depressed economic conditions, they implicate classes, their conflicts as well as their alliances, the relationship of classes with the state, the connection of political power with the ideological apparatus, the international situation, etc. Since revolution is a total

change, all aspects of social life are set in motion so that everything seems to interact and conditions everything else.

Both complexity and uniqueness present the serious problem of knowing whether revolutions can become the subject of a theoretical study, whether a comprehensive generalization with an explanatory dimension can be achieved. Most social scientists have opted for an exclusive method, that is, for an approach that is either narrative or structural. Likewise, in regards to the cause of revolutions, they have developed either a monistic or a multiple causal approach. To quote William H. Sewell,

All serious analysts agree that the causes of revolutions are complex. But in the face of this complexity they usually employ one of two strategies: a "hierarchical" strategy of asserting the primacy of some type of cause over the others, or a "narrative" strategy of trying to recount the course of the revolution in some semblance of its real complexity.¹

My intention is to show that these discussions are actually reducible to knowing whether ideological or structural causation is the decisive factor in the occurrence of revolution.

The hierarchical or the monistic approach argues that theorization requires that the manifold reality be brought under a major factor that is applicable to all revolutions. Only thus can revolutions be conceived of as law-governed social processes. Once the prime cause is identified, other factors will be approached as reinforcing, facilitating, or hindering elements. In other words,

while it successfully specifies the causal dynamics of one factor, it [the hierarchical method] tends to subordinate the roles of other factors, either treating them only as background (as most studies of revolution have done with the problem of the international setting) or conflating them with the chosen causal factor.²

A most famous example of the hierarchical approach is Marxism. All factors are subordinate to the basic factor of economic conflicts between classes reaching a breaking point. As a result, Marxism treats "the state as simply an expression of class power, rather than as a distinctive institution with its own interests and dynamics."³ Similarly, ideology is deprived of any autonomous causal impact, since ideas and beliefs reflect nothing more than the primacy of economic interests. These reductions give primacy to material life over conscious life, and so reproduce the basic premise of a materialist approach.

Reductionism must not be viewed as the exclusive peculiarity of materialist theories of revolution. Theories of revolution that give primacy to culture or ideology furnish an idealist version of the monistic or hierarchical approach. Ideology is then considered as the main cause and all other factors are subordinate to it. John Foran provides a good example of the primacy of culture when he argues in favor of "the centrality of culture in the making and unmaking of

revolutions."⁴ His argument maintains that social crises, whatever their magnitude, cannot translate into revolutionary movements without the emergence of an antagonistic vision proposing an alternative social order.

Some serious objections can be made against the hierarchical approach. To begin with, the very complexity of revolution defies the approach. So complex a process "can hardly come from a single cause, whether it be socioeconomic, like the Marxist theory, or biographical-psychological, like the conspiracy theory."⁵ It can only come from a combination of various causes, each being as important as the other causes. The combination creates a uniquely tense and convulsive situation, the very one required for an explosion of the magnitude of a social revolution.

Uniqueness and complexity explain why no theory has ever successfully predicted the occurrence of revolution. They also account for the rarity of revolutions: the combination of factors needed to activate revolution is neither common nor likely to occur regularly. Thus, no theory predicted the Iranian Revolution. Likewise, neither the U.S. government nor even the revolutionaries themselves knew that a revolution was in the making. None of the prime causes usually used to explain the Revolution is enough to clarify the Iranian uprising, since "most of these causes existed in other countries and did not lead to revolution."⁶ Without the occurrence of a special conflation of various causes, the mere presence of factors of social discontent does not translate into a revolutionary situation. The same thing can be said about the Ethiopian Revolution: though discontent was high, the Revolution came as a surprise to everybody. Notably, the formation and radicalization of the Derg were the two most decisive yet unpredictable events. Without the addition of special factors related to the Derg, the situation would not have been different from common discontents in other African countries.

The attempt to subordinate multiple factors to a prime cause can be actually quite misleading. What if one factor considered as secondary is so important that its occurrence alone determines the very possibility of revolution? For instance, Theda Skocpol has shown that social dissatisfaction and uprising cannot lead to revolution unless the state itself is in a condition of breakdown. Because the hierarchical approach overlooks the importance of other factors, it can rightly be accused of being "insufficiently analytical."⁷ The focus on one dominant cause neglects the complexity of revolution in favor of simplification, which results in misconceptions.

The Narrative Method

The serious shortcomings of the hierarchical method have led some scholars to argue in favor of a narrative approach. For such scholars, revolutions are so complex and dissimilar that a general theory is simply unattainable. Since their complexity and rarity point to an extraordinary encounter of specific conditions, circumstances, and contingencies, they do not lend themselves to theoretical generalizations. The best that can be done is to give an idea of the complexity

and uniqueness by recounting as faithfully as possible the events and their sequences and their particular contributions to the total outcome. In so doing, the narrative method resists giving more importance to one factor over another. Instead, it "discusses different causal features of the revolutionary process only as they make themselves felt in the unfolding of the story."⁸

Under normal conditions, social scientists isolate common and recurring phenomena of society and try to discover the laws governing such phenomena. But when a phenomenon is as rare, exceptional, and abnormal as revolution, theoretical generalizations are not viable. As Skocpol puts it:

A critic might well argue at this point that, precisely, because they are so few in number and tied to particular world-historical developments, revolutions as such should be studied only by "narrative historians," leaving social scientists free to theorize about more general phenomena.⁹

The uncommonness of revolution can only be described, narrated as a contingent occurrence without any pretension to generalization. The French and Russian Revolutions are unique phenomena that happened because of an extraordinary encounter of conditions and events. Crane Brinton's study of revolution provides a good example of narrative approach. After noting the desertion of intellectuals as a major symptom of revolution, Brinton asks "whether . . . revolutionary ideology 'causes' revolutionary action, or whether it is merely a sort of superfluous decoration with which the revolutionists cover their real acts and real motives."¹⁰ His answer clearly rejects the reductionism of the hierarchical approach:

We find that ideas are always a part of the pre-revolutionary situation, and we are quite content to let it go at that. No ideas, no revolution. This does not mean that ideas *cause* revolutions, or that the best way to prevent revolutions is to censor ideas. It merely means that ideas form part of the mutually dependent variables we are studying.¹¹

Against the narrative approach, scholars raise the objection that "no such drastic response is necessary. Revolution *can* be treated as 'a theoretical subject.'"¹² The refusal of a general theory in favor of narration simply gives up the attempt to explain revolutions. Indeed, in the narrative method "causes tend to get lost in a muddle of narrative detail and are never separated out sufficiently to make their autonomous dynamics clear."¹³ In putting the various causes at the same level, the method is unable to bring out the specific contribution of each cause. Still less is it capable of showing why all these factors contribute to the production of a single phenomenon known as revolution. These disparate factors cannot add up unless a dominant trend directs them. What is susceptible of conceptualization is precisely the common framework that makes all factors work toward one common resultant.

The Ideological Factor

Despite their respective deficiencies, both the narrative and hierarchical approaches reveal important aspects of revolutions. The best approach would then be the one that combines the two approaches without including their respective deficiencies. According to Sewell, Skocpol's approach is exactly accomplishing this result. He finds that her theory

is an inspired compromise, one that combines the best features of both the usual approaches while avoiding their faults. It appropriates the conceptual power of the hierarchical strategy and applies it to not one but several causal processes; but it also appropriates the narrative strategy's emphasis on sequence, conjuncture, and contingency.¹⁴

Skocpol corrects the defect of the hierarchical strategy by showing that revolution implicates multiple causal factors. She maintains that the comparative historical method, which has proved its validity in the study of other social phenomena, perfectly establishes a framework of multiple causes enabling the theoretical treatment of revolutions. Accordingly, revolutions happen when certain conditions are gathered. Thus, class struggle is not enough to cause revolution; the breakdown of the state is as important as heightened social discontents. And the breakdown of the state depends on other factors outside class struggle, such as the international situation. This external factor implicates a historical context defined by contingency, notably, involvement in a war situation. The historical context and the part of contingency explain why revolutions are rare and unpredictable.

The whole question is to know whether this multiple causal approach, which Skocpol herself defines as the "structural perspective," does not overlook a crucial aspect of revolutions.¹⁵ As already pointed out, "the most widespread complaint made against Skocpol's work at the time and since has been that it mishandled the role of human ideas and ideology."¹⁶ The neglect of ideology fully transpires when she writes: "revolutions are not made; they come."¹⁷ To deny any significant role to ideology by conceiving of revolutions as an outcome of structural conditions unaffected by goal-oriented activities does not make them intelligible. It is no less excessive to claim that human will is enough to cause revolution than to simply ignore it. If anything, a multiple causal approach should be multiple enough to include ideology as a causal factor.

The exclusion of ideology indicates that Skocpol's synthesis leaves behind important features of the narrative approach. For the latter, the involvement of human subjectivity in the form of charismatic individuals, inspiring beliefs, and emotional drives is constitutive of the contingency of revolutionary situations. To many critics, the Iranian Revolution refutes the structural perspective by showing the importance of ideology. As discussed in Chapter 2, a revolution occurred in Iran, though many of the structural conditions enumerated by Skocpol were not gathered. Notably, the state was nowhere near to reflecting a

situation of breakdown. Willy-nilly, the force of the Islamist ideology stands out as a major factor, thereby proving the central role of ideology in the Iranian Revolution. I hasten to remind that the Ethiopian Revolution provides another case of a successful revolutionary uprising even though no structural constraint prevented the imperial state from fully mobilizing its repressive power. No less than in the Iranian case is the Ethiopian uprising intelligible without the Marxist-Leninist orientation of an important faction of the educated elite.

Since ideology cannot be simply ignored, the approach that gives primacy to structural causes while allowing some room for the agency of ideas would be the perfect method. According to Michael S. Kimmel,

An adequate explanation of revolution required setting the structural stage, making state, class, and international arena decisive, and yet allowing room for the complex play of human agency, of people's hopes and angers, mediated by culture and ideology that are historically specific to the country in question.¹⁸

The proposal seems ideal and quite appropriate to study a phenomenon as complex as revolution. It pursues the structural approach, but does not lose sight of the role of human agency, thereby truly understanding revolution as an interaction of various causes producing a common resultant.

Though ideal for social scientists, such an eclectic perspective is not philosophically sound. Indeed, for various factors to produce a common outcome instead of neutralizing one another or pulling the process in contradictory directions, there must be some hegemonic driving power. Without the input of a general direction, a *telos*, the impact of other factors would not add up to produce a common and complex result. Clearly, the more we insist on the multiplicity of causes, the higher becomes the necessity for an organizing force that combines their effects. Needed, therefore, is some kind of hierarchical approach, but this time it is less about selecting one structural cause as the primary factor than about establishing a primacy of ontological order.

The Philosophical Perspective

The return to a hierarchical approach calls upon the old philosophical problem of the relationship between mind and matter. The issue is none other than the philosophical question of knowing which, of matter or mind, is primary in the explanation of reality as well as of human actions. According as a thought system gives primacy to ideas or material conditions, it reflects an idealist or materialist approach to revolution. Those theoreticians who give primacy to ideology echo an idealist philosophical standpoint, while theoreticians ranking material conditions above ideology have a materialist perspective. Thus, the Marxist hierarchical approach became possible as a result of materialist reductionism, since to give material conditions the primary role means, in the words of Marx, that

We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.¹⁹

By contrast, G. W. F. Hegel upholds the idealist principle of the primacy of ideas over material conditions when he writes:

The destiny of the spiritual World, and—since this is the *substantial World*, while the physical remains subordinate to it . . . —the *final cause of the World at large*, we allege to be the *consciousness* of its own freedom on the part of Spirit, and *ipso facto*, the *reality* of that freedom.²⁰

The philosophical perspective widens the hierarchical approach: in addition to organizing diverse causes, it provides direction to social changes. For Marx, the evolutionary, or better the dialectical, tendency of material processes pushes social organization toward greater complexity and efficiency. Accordingly, factors and events lead to revolution, that is, to a higher and better social organization, because of the inherently dialectical tendency of material organizations. This evolutionary direction also orients human thinking toward progressive ideas, mainly expressed by the increasing dominance of scientific concepts over religious and traditional beliefs. For Hegel, the evolutionary tendency originates from spiritual life rather than from material processes, since freedom is the driving goal of the historical process. The goal of freedom gives the general direction of social change toward rational life, increasing mastery over nature, and the recognition of human dignity.

Because of its very unusualness, complexity, and deep disruptiveness, revolution solicits a pronouncement on the philosophical issue of primacy. Since it presents a situation in which human beings visibly endeavor to actively change their conditions of life, no theory of revolution can avoid the problem of primacy. To quote Mark N. Hagopian,

The working definition of revolution that a social scientist employs, stated or not, affects his study from beginning to end. If he is interested in the causes of revolution and his concept of revolution is basically economic, then he tends to investigate mainly, if not exclusively, the economic condition of the pre-revolutionary society. If, on the contrary, he conceives of revolution as an attempt to build a perfect society or utopia, he will devote considerable energy to surveying the "intellectual origins" of the revolution.²¹

Evidently, the working definition of revolution involves the philosophical problem of primacy, since scholars with an economic approach must reduce the impact of ideas, just as scholars with a utopian perspective must minimize the force of structural conditions.

The utopian perspective cannot be validated unless it is shown that ideas impart a direction of change transcending material conditions. Ideas prevail if

the direction of social change results from voluntarism, that is, from an inspiration outreaching the limitations of material conditions. By contrast, the structural approach minimizes the impact of ideas by showing that, whatever be the ideological inspiration, structural conditions always impose the direction of change. This is so true that one of the reasons why Skocpol dismisses the impact of ideology is that, owing to structural limitations, revolutionary leaders "have typically ended up accomplishing very different tasks and furthering the consolidation of quite different kinds of new regimes from those they originally (and perhaps ever) ideologically intended."²² The universal failure of revolutionary utopia refutes the primacy of ideas by demonstrating that structural constraints always succeed in defeating utopia.

While the structural perspective emphasizes the defeat of utopia, the utopian approach to revolution highlights the inspiration to transcend objective limitations. What makes revolutionary ideas so attractive and motivating is the belief that human will can prevail over structural limitations. Thus, the socialist ideology became attractive to revolutionary leaders of Third World countries because it promised to overpower the numerous constraints facing such countries. Let us not forget that the galvanizing power of utopia also moves the masses. What else but the power of utopia can explain that people suddenly rise to change the life that they had so far accepted? Rightly, Jeffery M. Paige alludes to scholars who attribute to revolution an "awesome power" that "lies in [the] waves of energy and enthusiasm and the utopian visions."²³

Take Forrest D. Colburn's study of the Ethiopian Revolution, for instance. He finds the source of the uprising in what he calls "the culture of revolution," a phenomenon characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s. The expression suggests that the idea of revolution had become so fashionable that it had developed an autonomous power of motivation. As a result, "this fashionable political imagination profoundly shaped the institutional and policy choices of revolutionary elites."²⁴ The Ethiopian Revolution derives more from this political imagination than from structural conditions, which in any case were scarcely conducive to a socialist type of transformation.

The immaturity of socialist revolutions in Third World countries confirms that the culture of revolution "gives revolutions a logic and dynamic of their own, one not derivable from the necessity of social conditions or the ineluctability of social structures and processes."²⁵ This does not mean that the culture of revolution by itself caused the Ethiopian Revolution; other conditions were also necessary. However, if the social uprising drifted toward revolution instead of reform, it is because of the overriding impact of the culture of revolution on the Ethiopian educated elite. Witness: though similar structural problems exist today, nobody speaks of revolution for the simple reason that it is no longer in vogue. Without the acceptance of the autonomous power of revolutionary ideas, the direction of the social change in Ethiopia toward a revolutionary outcome is anything but intelligible.

Arguments in Favor of the Primacy of Ideology

Considerations pertaining to the specific character of revolution can strengthen the view that the Ethiopian Revolution underlines the importance of the ideological factor. The contention is that structural crises, however intense and wide they may be, can cause uprisings, rebellions, but not social revolutions. For the latter to occur there must be a mental component, a utopian vision setting uprisings on a revolutionary course. This discrepancy between the crises and the option for revolutionary course demands the attribution of an "independent power and dynamics to ideology."²⁶ The revolutionary option does more than merely correct or reform an existing society; it wants to fashion society in accordance with a utopian vision. Any definition that does not include the intervention of utopia fails to integrate the factor that makes revolutions revolutionary.

Acknowledging the importance of utopia and going beyond the usual definition of revolution as a violent transformation of the political system and class structure of a given society, Paige proposes the following definition:

A revolution is a rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current social order.²⁷

He insists that "this definition is not simply cultural or ideological," since it comprises an alteration in the distribution of power, without which there is no revolution.²⁸ For instance, in May 1968, there was a profound cultural change in France, but no revolution because the cultural movement failed to alter the existing power distribution.

The appearance of a utopian alternative course pinpoints the defects of the existing order, but even more so attacks the legitimacy of the ruling class. Revolution is not simply about discontent over conditions of life; it is also about the ruling class losing its political and ideological ascendancy. A regime can survive discontents so long as it conserves legitimacy. The loss of legitimacy has deeper effects because "legitimacy, seen as the nexus between the political order and the cultural-symbolic order ties power to conceptions of what is 'right' and approved."²⁹ In thus challenging the ethical underpinnings of a social order, the loss of legitimacy goes deeper than discontents over conditions of life; it provokes a cultural divorce between the ruling class and the rest of society. The appearance of a competing ideology, that is, of an alternative social order establishing new metaphysical and social norms, means not only that people are unhappy with the regime, but also that they are ready to tear it down to its foundations.

This study of the Ethiopian Revolution has emphasized the centrality of legitimacy by showing that none of the causes of discontent would have led to the fall of Haile Selassie's regime without the loss of legitimacy subsequent to the spread of radical ideology among students, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and junior

officers. Notably, the desertion of the armed forces in a context devoid of military defeat is hard to explain without involving the demystifying effect of the Marxist-Leninist discourse. The Ethiopian and the Iranian Revolutions share many similarities. Just as in Ethiopia, what primarily explains the collapse of the shah is the erosion of legitimacy under the impact of the Islamist ideology. Because the spread of a culture of opposition played a decisive role, the Iranian Revolution "put the domain of culture squarely on the agenda of a new generation of scholars (Skocpol among them), forcing an appreciation of the role played by revolutionary Islam in its making."³⁰

For many authors, the impact of ideology separates mere revolts from revolutions. Revolts become revolutionary only when discontents reach the level of divorce with the existing order. As Hagopian puts it, "revolutions differ from revolts because they are not only against something, but also *for* something radically new."³¹ Clearly, the difference results from the longing for an alternative order induced by ideological opposition. Equally obvious is the fact that both the crafting and the spread of utopian discourses put intellectuals and revolutionary groups at the center of revolutionary movements. Revolts turn into revolutionary movements when elites committed to radical ideologies assume the leadership of social protests. Defending the crucial role of revolutionary elites, Hagopian writes, "if ideology and organization are important aspects of revolution, the importance of elite formations seems assured. They create and propagate revolutionary ideologies and direct the various organizational manifestations of the revolutionary movement."³²

The crucial role of radicalized elites further enhances the impact of ideology by linking the occurrence of revolution to culturally heretical groups. Recent studies of the French Revolution perfectly corroborate the link, and so question the classical interpretations, Marxist as well as liberal, according to which the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution that originated from the need to overthrow a ferociously conservative nobility. These studies demonstrate that the French nobility "was anything but a closed caste," just as they show that most members of the class were business-minded so that they "managed their properties with an eye to making a profit."³³ This progressive conversion of the nobility to bourgeois values no longer supports the view that the modernization of France required its overthrow. The absence of a widespread social conservatism on the part of the nobility underlines the need to find a different explanation for the revolutionary upheaval.

François Furet finds the new explanation by shifting his attention to the episode called "the Reign of Terror," which episode brings out the impact of radical ideology. Fully agreeing with Alexis de Tocqueville's view that egalitarian and democratic radicalism specifies the French Revolution, he writes:

The revolutionary process merely expressed two modes of historical action, namely, the use of violence and the use of ideology (or intellectual illusion); and in reality these two modes are one. For violence and political radicalism are

inherent in the eschatological ideology of a "before" and an "after", of the old and the new, that characterized the revolutionary endeavor.³⁴

Furet traces this radical ideology back to absolutism and the political marginalization of the nobility, but also to the egalitarian views of Jean Jacques Rousseau. The revolutionary elite's adoption of Rousseauist egalitarianism particularly explains France's idiosyncratic path: while the normal course should have been the modernization of the political system through a political revolution in the fashion of England, France drifted toward social revolution under the influence of the egalitarian ideology whose most consequential expression was the institution of terror.

The answer to the crucial question of why France did not follow the path of England is not the nature of the nobility, but the emergence of groups armed with an egalitarian ideology. These radical groups hijacked the political revolution and pushed the social protests into the path of social revolution, that is, into a social change pursuing utopian ideals rather than the corrections of the old system. Some such explanation easily extends to other cases of social revolution. Thus, as the second phase of the Russian Revolution, the October Revolution overthrew the Provisional Government and initiated the change toward social revolution. No explanation is feasible if it does not assign this change of direction to the radical ideology of the Bolsheviks. The same can be said about the Iranian Revolution: social discontents are not enough to explain the uprising; the ideological discourse is as important as the social crisis. To quote Mansoor Moaddel:

The revolutionary crisis began when the social discontent was expressed in terms of Shi'i revolutionary discourse. . . . The themes of the Shi'i revolutionary discourse (that Iran's problems were related to the West's cultural domination and the un-Islamic nature of the institution of monarchy, and that there was a religious solution to these problems) contradicted in essence the monarchy-centered nationalist discourse.³⁵

This book has reiterated that the rise of the Derg and its radicalization are organically connected with the radical discourse of the civilian left. However severe the social discontent may have been, it would not have become revolutionary without its expression in terms of Marxist-Leninist discourse. The destruction of the monarchy and nobility as well as the rejection of reformism are inseparable from the commitment to socialist egalitarianism. A social revolution occurred not because of the severity of social problems or the impossibility of reforms, but because elite groups committed to radical beliefs assumed the leadership of the social protest.

Political Conflict and Radicalization

No sooner is the crucial role of ideology established than another question asking why some groups become attracted to utopian beliefs crops up. The question

seems to challenge the philosophy of the primacy of ideas over structural conditions that this study has so far supported. Not only is the question of why some elite groups become radicalized legitimate, but it is also disputing the primacy of ideology by ascribing deeper causes to radicalization. The trouble with ideology is that it cannot be taken as a self-sufficient motive if only because it is more of a justification than a driving force. We recognize here Marx's basic objection to idealism, which is that "the phantoms formed in the human brain are . . . sublimates of . . . material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises."³⁶

Theories of revolution opposing the derivation of ideological commitments from concrete material interests deal with symptoms, echoes, and not with real and determining causes. Ideas explain revolutions when the real issue is to know why people have such ideas. However numerous and cogent the arguments in favor of the primacy of ideology appear to be, they fall flat when analysis turns to the question of why some groups become specifically enamored with utopian ideas.

At first look, the Ethiopian Revolution seems to corroborate the justificatory role of ideology. Indeed, as we saw, the radicalization of the Derg presents the particularity of being a posterior occurrence so that its close association with conflict for power is quite obvious. From the investigation into the Derg's adoption of Marxism-Leninism, one unequivocal answer emerges tying the conversion with the need to justify and consolidate the seizure of political power. Because the conversion to socialist ideology is posterior, it cannot be attributed to social altruism or to prior intellectual conviction. The Derg thus provides a clear case of political conflict inducing a specific type of ideological belief. This is so true that, according to many scholars, the need to steal the legitimacy of the civilian left explains the radicalization of the Derg.

The reason that brought about the radicalization of the Derg also seems to account for the ideological orientation of the civilian left. Both the repressive and closed nature of the imperial regime pressed the educated elite to identify with lower classes and, more importantly, to see the complete destruction of the existing order as a prerequisite to its empowerment. The condition of political assent was that the educated elite positioned itself as an outcast, since the secluded nature of the imperial regime gave to political competition the form of a struggle between exclusive elites. When political competition becomes exclusive, that is, when it offers no space for accommodation, it favors radicalization, given that the demolition of the existing order alone opens access to power for aspiring elites. In the case of Ethiopia, the educated elite's need to develop heretical characteristics for the purpose of political empowerment found a ready-made expression in the hegemony of Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁷

When economic crisis in the early 1970s caused widespread social discontents leading to demonstrations and social unrests, the civilian left quickly assumed the leadership of the protest and coined it in terms of Marxist-Leninist

ideology. The egalitarian utopia was necessary both to obtain the support of the masses and demolish the exclusive rule of the old aristocracy. With the struggle to overthrow the imperial regime intensifying, a new and unexpected player emerged, to wit, the Derg, which represented the political ambition of a coalition of junior officers and NCOs. The Derg quickly realized that the initiation of a social revolution—alone able to totally dismantle the aristocratic order and justify the institution of terror—was the only way to defeat all its political rivals, the most important being the nobility, senior army officers, and the civilian left. Conflicts for power within the Derg further intensified the trend toward radicalization. In short, the unconventional character of the Derg made the preservation of power conditional on radicalization. The expression of the social protest in terms of Marxist-Leninist ideology by the civilian left worked well for the political promotion of an unorthodox group of junior officers and NCOs.

Predatory Nature of Ideology

Though the elites' radicalization underscores the decisive nature of power struggle, my argument maintains that the Ethiopian Revolution provides a unique opportunity to reassert the primacy of ideology while taking into consideration the Marxist objection. The real question is to know how this firm grounding of radical ideology in political competition between exclusive elites actually exhibits the philosophical primacy of the mental over the material. It does so by revealing two important facts about revolutions. First, it shows that radicalism is less about the pursuit of ideal society than a phenomenon of power struggle under specific conditions. Second, this very revelation implies that radical ideology (and with greater reason moderate creeds) is a derived discourse in that it gets its inspiration and most of its contents from intellectual creation's outside the realm of politics.

A striking example is Christianity: Christian beliefs have been used in medieval times and after to justify political systems, even though the systems openly clashed with the beliefs. This ideological utilization of Christian beliefs explains Marx's assimilation of religion to an illusory escape from the harsh realities of real life. In actual terms, what appears as escape to Marx was the indecent use of mysticism for political purpose. In other words, with all due respect to Marx, religion serves as "opium" more to elite politics than to the people. While for the people religion is what transcends politics, elites hijack religious sentiments to beautify the pursuit of hegemony.

The open clash of the ideological arrogation with the original vision and teachings of Jesus Christ clearly indicates that the two must not be identified. As forcefully defended in St. Augustine's notion of the "Two Cities," the heavenly city is radically distinct from the earthly city. Christ's inspiration was mystical and, as such, utterly impractical for political purpose. Only an outrageous reductionism can limit the inspiration to social conflicts when it is first of all reflective of a spiritual need transcending political power and economic interests. The reductionism overlooks that, more than conflict for power or economic interest,

the awareness of death, or to use Martin Heidegger's expression, the fact of being "a being-toward-death" defines human beings.³⁸ The main function of religious inspiration is to deal with the human condition of death through the provision of a transcendental meaning. In effect, a tremendous amount of adjustment and exegetic effort by numerous ideologues was necessary to bend the mystical inspiration to the political needs of kings and feudal lords. The usage of the ideology of divine mandate to justify the power of kings is a pertinent example of appropriation of mysticism for political purpose.

We noted that the egalitarian idea that inspired the French Revolution was taken from Rousseau. Nevertheless, any identification of Rousseau with Maximilien de Robespierre or Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just, besides encountering numerous inconsistencies, would simply overlook that Rousseau's inspiration is not political, that whatever is political in his work cannot be separated from his philosophical project of returning human beings to nature. Only in the context of a return to nature does the egalitarian vision make sense. The use of this idea to overthrow the French monarchy and nobility constitutes an ideological reinterpretation serving the needs of a competing political elite.

The notion of the Islamic state, as developed by the Iranian Revolution, furnishes a contemporary example of appropriation of a religious fervor for political competition. Moaddel shows the ideologization of Islam when he notes:

Shi'i revolutionary discourse is neither rooted in the political theory of pristine Shi'ism nor in the institutional development of Shi'i ulama that began in the nineteenth century. Nor is it correct to argue that Shi'i ideology and religious institutions constituted *preexisting* organizations that were utilized by the revolutionary actors. This work argues that the ideology of Islamic opposition was *produced* by diverse intellectuals.³⁹

For Islamic clerics and traditional merchants marginalized by the modernizing policy of the shah, no better way existed to regain their influence and status than to undermine the regime's legitimacy. They did so by presenting the shah's centralized and secularized state and his policy of alliance with the West as manifestations of anti-Islamism so that disobedience to such a state became nothing short of an Islamic duty.

The distinction between ideology and ideology-transcending mental production provides the only way to protect Marx's inspiration and work from a complete identification with all those who claimed to be Marxist. When Marx reduces idealism to an ideological discourse, he assumes that his own discourse is not ideological and that it reflects the objective reality. Unfortunately, the basis for establishing such a distinction is removed if some forms of mental activity are not sufficiently separated from ideological needs, that is, from needs expressing social conflicts. If idealism cannot be anything else than ideology, then no ground exists for Marxism to have a different claim. Marx's famous statement, namely, "all I know is that I am not a Marxist," was actually a protest against the

usage of the theory for ideological purposes by French radicals of the late 1870s.⁴⁰

Though a leading scholar in the ideologization of Marx, V. I. Lenin rejected any attempt to reduce Marxism to an ideological discourse. He understood that such a reduction would negatively affect the claim to objective truth, thereby diminishing the influence of the theory. In addition, many authors have argued that what makes Marxism attractive is the religious inspiration behind the idea of communism, which promises to bridge the gap between the earthly and heavenly city. To reduce Marxism to no more than an expression of social conflicts would utterly turn it into an ideological discourse, that is, into a form of thought appropriating Christian mysticism for political purpose. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to maintain that ideology is only a component of a much broader cognitive faculty and philosophical goal. That is why transcending the social determinant, Lenin assigns theoretical origins to Marxism by emphasizing that it is "the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism."⁴¹ That Marxism has such theoretical sources means that it expresses but also transcends the class interests of the proletariat for the reason that it inherits and continues the universalism of humans' cognitive activity.

My attempt to separate ideologues from original creators agrees in some way with Karl Mannheim's differentiation between utopia and ideology. As noted in Chapter 4, for Mannheim, ideology expresses a mode of thought conditioned by interests and political needs, while utopia goes beyond reality and challenges the existing order. The role of ideologues, that is, of representatives of a given social order, is to neutralize utopia so that challenging "ideas would be confined to a world beyond history and society, where they could not affect the *status quo*."⁴² Where I differ from Mannheim is in my claim that the role of ideologues is not confined to shutting the door of the real world to utopia; it also includes the skillful selection and appropriation of utopian ideas to mobilize people for a new social order. This is particularly the case of revolutionary elites, who use the destabilizing power of utopian ideas to fight closed social orders. When they do so, they turn utopian ideas into ideological justification.

Some such distinction between ideologues and forerunners does establish the autonomy of the mental. Rather than being conditioned by interests and political needs, the work of the forerunner properly expresses mental needs, such as cognitive, religious, aesthetical, or affective aspirations. More often than not, political elites hijack these mental productions to defend or challenge the *status quo*, and so turn them into ideologies. To the extent that a separate mental production is hijacked for the purpose of political empowerment, the social situation directly determines the ideological discourse. Moreover, because the effectiveness of the discourse requires that the appropriation be unconscious, ideological thinking affiliates with the state of mind that Marx qualifies as "false consciousness." Ideological discourse must retain the claim of being rooted in mental productions occurring independently of economic and political interests if it is to be normative and hence galvanizing or commanding. Especially, the

claim of a mystical sponsor is how it channels the force of emotion into the arena of political struggle. If arrogation defines ideology, then it is safe to argue that some forms of thinking transcend social conflicts.

This conception of ideology perfectly explains the radicalization of the Derg. For one thing, it shows that the type of political competition involving exclusive elites generates the need for a radical ideology. For another, the fact that subaltern military men with no prior intellectual connivance with Marxism-Leninism so easily and with some sincerity converted to revolutionary ideas reveals the mental operation behind ideological thinking. The radicalization of the Derg puts out in the open the secret of ideological thinking, which is the method of appropriation. Posit the Derg's political need, and you unleash a thinking driven by the need to appropriate whatever serves it. Seeing its mode of formation, its composition, and the nature of its adversaries, it was not hard for most Derg members to figure out that a radical social agenda best served the absolute power and the attendant method of terror that they needed to emerge victorious.

Let us not forget that what made Marxism attractive to Derg members was not so much its philosophical contents as the finding that ideas that looked like the Christian ideas of equality and justice were metamorphosed into instruments to overthrow a regime that claimed to have a divine blessing. More importantly, the metamorphosis crowned their Robinhoodism with an entitlement to power. Stated otherwise, they liked Marxism to the extent that it legitimized their power by providing them with a discourse that both mobilized the Christian values of the society against the imperial regime and authorized their rise to power as righters of wrongs.

The ideological appropriation of religious values appears clearly in a 1975 editorial published in *Addis Zemen*, a government newspaper. In order to justify the Derg's adoption of socialism, the editorial writes: "the secret foundation of any good religion is socialism. It teaches about human dignity and love and leads to this great goal."⁴³ However, past ruling classes have all used Christian beliefs to further their own interests to the detriment of working people. What is new with the socialism of the Derg is the serious and practical effort toward the "re-appropriation of the authentic characters of love and peace" of Christianity and Islam.⁴⁴ Another instance of appropriation is the transformation of Mengistu Haile Mariam's narcissism into a vehement commitment to socialism. We saw how grandiosity and the need to be loved and admired propelled Mengistu to become the chief advocate of socialist ideas. Ethnonationalism, too, exhibits a similar process of appropriation: as we saw, ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia highlights the usage of natural sentiments associated with relatedness and identity to maximize elite interests.

A parallel somewhat close to a predatory understanding of ideology is to say that ideology is to thinking what manufacturers are to inventors. Just as manufacturers use the ideas of creators to make profit, so too ideologies appropriate mental productions of a different order to promote elite interests. The un-

derstanding confirms the autonomy of the inspiring religious utopia, philosophical theme, or primordial sentiment, hence the primacy of non-ideological forms of thinking. Be it noted that each time scholars speak of ideology as construction, they are but revealing its predatory nature, that is, the arrogation of norms and beliefs of different orders for specific political goals.

Notes

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Glossary

Aksumite civilization: Ancient and powerful civilization that flourished in northern Ethiopia and whose capital was the town of Aksum.

Amhara: Ethnic group primarily located in the north central highlands of Ethiopia. The Amhara, who make up approximately 30 percent of the population, speak Amharic and dominated the country's political and economic life until the fall of the Derg in 1991.

Gult: Granted right of tribute collection from peasants.

Kibre Negast: Book compiled early in the fourteenth century and considered to be Ethiopia's most important literary work. Translated as the "Glory of the Kings," it relates, among other things, the Solomonic descent of Ethiopian kings.

Oromo: Ethnic group located in eastern and southern Ethiopia and considered to be the largest in the country. They were conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire by Menelik II (r. 1889–1913).

Rist: Lineage system of land ownership characteristic of northern Ethiopia

Showa: Locale in the southern part of Amhara region that has produced the most influential elite of modern Ethiopia. Both Emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie I were from Showa.

Tigreans: Ethnic group living in northern Ethiopia (Tigray) where the ancient Aksumite kingdom prospered. Tigreans and Amhara share the same culture and have a long history of political rivalry.

Wollega: Oromo territory situated in Western Ethiopia.

Wollo: Region situated north of Showa.

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"Messay Kebede has written an enormously important book. He definitively places the Ethiopian revolution as one of the twentieth century's 'great revolutions,' on par with the Russian or Chinese in terms of scope of transformation. Messay provides a systematic and compelling argument on one of the key puzzles of the revolution: internal power struggles within the military junta known as the Derg. Messay argues, drove this movement of revolutionary change. Everyone interested in contemporary Ethiopia or comparative revolutions will benefit from this book."

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—**Donald L. Donham**, University of California, Davis

Ideology and Elite Conflicts provides a theoretical explanation of the major outcomes of Ethiopia's social revolution, namely, the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and the implementation of a far-reaching Marxist-Leninist revolution by a military committee (the Derg) and its collapse in 1991. Messay Kebede extensively discusses the question of whether existing theories of revolution shed light on the eruption of a radical revolution in Ethiopia and, most of all, whether they can accommodate the major anomaly of a socialist revolution being executed by a military committee that radicalized after the removal of the imperial regime. Hence the central thesis of the book: both the overthrow of the monarchical order and the radicalization of the Derg must be tied to social conditions that exacerbated elite conflicts for scarce resources, with the consequence that the espousal of radical ideologies (socialism and ethnonationalism) became the sole avenue for the exclusive control of state power.

Moreover, this book shows how the struggle of exclusive elites for the control of the state explains the Derg's need to put its fate in the hands of a providential leader, to wit, Mengistu Haile Mariam. In light of the theoretical debate over the role of charismatic leaders in history, this book establishes how Mengistu's narcissism led him to become the sole owner of the revolution and how his dictatorial rule brought about his own demise and that of the Derg, following the military defeat of the Ethiopian army at the hands of ethnonationalist insurgents. Another fundamental contribution of this book is a theoretical articulation of political conflicts and ideology that critically intervenes in the divisive issue of the primary cause of revolutions. Granted that ideology is more of a justification than a drive, the Ethiopian case illustrates how conflicts between mutually exclusive elites favor the path of political outbidding, mobilizing utopian projects so as to galvanize the support of the masses. The perceived transcendence of utopia from partisan politics gives proof that ideology is a predatory form of thinking in that it hijacks values belonging to different cognitive and affective realms for the purpose of empowering exclusionary interests.

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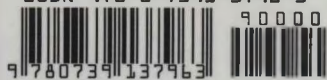


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